

GAMEREACTOR™

PLAYSTATION NINTENDO PC MOBILE FEBRUARY 2015 ISSUE 17

MAJORA'S MASK

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA RETURNS TO NINTENDO 3DS

FREE
MAGAZINE



DEAD OR ALIVE[®] 5

LAST ROUND

The fight comes to PS4™ and Xbox One!



New characters!



New stages!



More explosive action!

20 February 2015

Steam: 30 March 2015



PS4

PS3



XBOX ONE

XBOX 360



TECMO

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CLEARING HOUSE

It was a backlog that literally filled a small bedroom for years. Now it fits upon a book shelf. After taking an extended sabbatical from work to go travelling last year, I came back home to a Self Storage lot bursting with ten years plus of gaming goods and decided, much like my long locks of yesteryear, an excessive trim was in order.

Surprisingly, aside from a few solo delights it is mostly multi-game series that survived the cull. I'm wary of unnecessary sequels and cheap cash-ins, but when I look to what I've kept it is titles that have tried to advance and expand the core concepts of the original entries rather than purely replicate them. And there's as much enjoyment in arguing whether the additions were successful (the tightness of Arkham Asylum versus the sprawl of Arkham City) or which titles are purer (the Dead Space trilogy) as there is experiencing the improvements (the combat and character design of Assassin's Creed II versus the original).

That's why we're glad to celebrate the likes of The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt and The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask, both of which you can read about in this issue. With the former, CPR isn't content with signing off from the series with a simple touch up of what's went before. Instead it is looking to expand and better what it's learn from the last two games, while Nintendo dabbled in something very different for the latter, and the result was a curveball that smashed convention in the Zelda series and became a classic in its own right.

I'm off to get started on my reduced backlog of titles (starting with the triple-bill of Final Fantasy XII, Dragon's Quest VIII and Twilight Princess. I likely won't see daylight until 2019), but before I do, a few special words

of thanks to our Associate Editor Mike Holmes, who did most of the heavy lifting of this issue while I was off getting a tan. Hope you enjoy his work, and the rest of the mag.

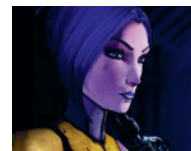


GILLEN MCALLISTER
EDITOR IN CHIEF



TAKING OFF THE MASK

As the black sheep of the Zelda family gets a re-release via an updated and refined 3DS version, we talk to its creator Eiji Aonuma about twisting the fairytale of the Legend of Zelda series, as well as what we can expect next from him.



CONNECTED

Totting up 2015's releases, Looking to Microsoft's future, free Halo, new Borderlands as well as DLC and Mobile.



ART

Evocative artwork and strong words from Hello Games on the vision behind the unique No Man's Sky.



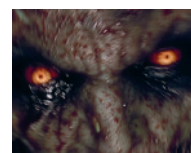
THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

After what feels like a lifetime we finally get hands-on time with Geralt's latest adventure as CPR offer up a substantial slice of gameplay from Wild Hunt. Is the game still one of our most hotly anticipated titles of 2015? Find out this issue.



DEVELOPER STORIES

Creative Assembly ready for conversational war as Mike Simpson steps up to talk his industry career thus far.



REVIEWS

War, zombies, teen angst, alternate dimensions, prison breaks, work after death and fighting the devil.

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CONNECTED

2015: A GOLDEN YEAR FOR GAMING?

This year could be one of the best for gaming, but only if publishers seize the opportunity.

> **It wouldn't be fair to call 2014 a write-off.** There were plenty of decent games released, but if you had to give it a grade - and that's what we journalists do, right? - it'd probably have been a 7 out of 10. Solid, good even, but ultimately it could have been better.

Part of the reason for that less-than-perfect score was the number of game devs that postponed their titles and pushed them back into 2015. As a result we're looking at an incredible spread of games coming out in the first months of this year, headlined by titles such as *Evolve*, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, *Batman: Arkham Knight* and *Project CARS*, each one a potential classic in the making. Those headliners are part of an even longer list of games that slipped into this year. Microsoft and Remedy's experimental fusion of media, *Quantum Break*, joins PlayStation exclusive *The Order: 1886* in the coming year. And let's not forget *Mad Max* and *The Division*, both of which will be late on arrival.

So a good slice of 2014's games are going to be released in the coming months, and then there's the small matter of the games that were always intended for 2015. Of course some of these are going to slip into the next year, but it's hard to imagine a year as affected by delays as the one we've just had.

But why was 2014 the year of the delay? It likely has a lot to do with studios still getting to grips with the new hardware of PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, at the same time as they start to scale up

their ambitions. With bigger, more technical games in development on relatively new consoles, it's hardly a surprise that a selection of titles were pushed back.

We're hugely excited about what's in store for us. Adventure fans on both current-gen platforms are going to be well served when *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* and *Rise of the Tomb Raider* scrap it out. *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, *Just Cause 3*, *The Division*, *Final Fantasy XV*, *The Witcher 3*, and the new *Legend of Zelda* game; all promise to be engaging and immersive open-world adventures (we're kind of looking forward to *Assassin's Creed: Victory* too - though after *Unity* there's some repair work to be done on that franchise's reputation).

There'll be the usual shooters aiming at your wallet in 2015. *Halo 5: Guardians* is shaping up to be a return to form. No doubt there'll be a *Call of Duty* game towards the end of the year. A new *Battlefield* is coming when *Hardline* launches, and we're expecting a standalone expansion for *Destiny* towards the end of the year.



WITH MANY OF LAST YEAR'S GAMES SLIPPING INTO 2015, THIS COULD BE AN EPIC YEAR.

Strategy fans should be well serviced. Total War: Attila will be out around the time you read this, and Paradox will deliver Hearts of Iron IV this year, and Galactic Civilizations III is also due in the coming months. Throw into the mix some stellar indie games (Broforce, No Man's Sky, Gang Beasts), a raft of PC and Nintendo exclusives that we've barely had time to mention, and what we've got lined up ahead of us is an exciting mix of titles.

Having said that, there's still trepidation in some quarters, and the more cynical among us are looking at the year ahead with concern. The new consoles have brought with them a few practices that are far from universally popular. For example, there's a worrying predilection towards adding unnecessary micro-transactions to games, or bulking out titles with mind-numbing filler so they can save the good stuff and sell it to us in the form of expensive season passes. The investment needed to get the most out of a game seems to be ever-rising.

It's these kind of practices, and the more worrying trend of unfinished games being shipped

to maximise revenues, that have many gamers on the defensive. Exclusivity deals and pre-order bonuses also seem to be on the rise, but it's up to gamers to either accept or reject these marketing plays. It's likely that if we could cut through this PR red tape, and could concentrate solely on the games, we'd have a better time of it as consumers. That's the ultimate challenge for studios and publishers in 2015: They've got the great games lined up, they've just got to sell them to us straight. If they can do that, then maybe, just maybe, we'll have a year to remember.

The Division (top) and Batman: Arkham Knight (opposite page). Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain (right), Project CARS (middle), and Battlefield: Hardline (left).

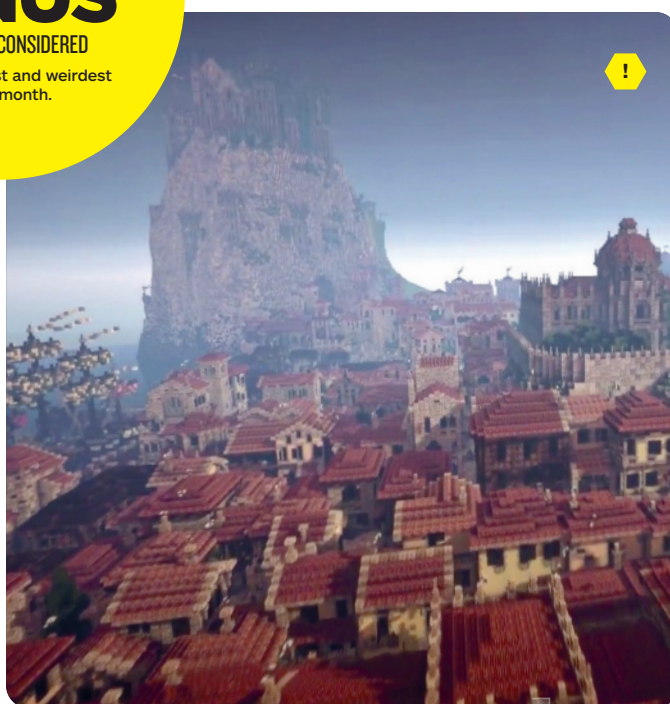
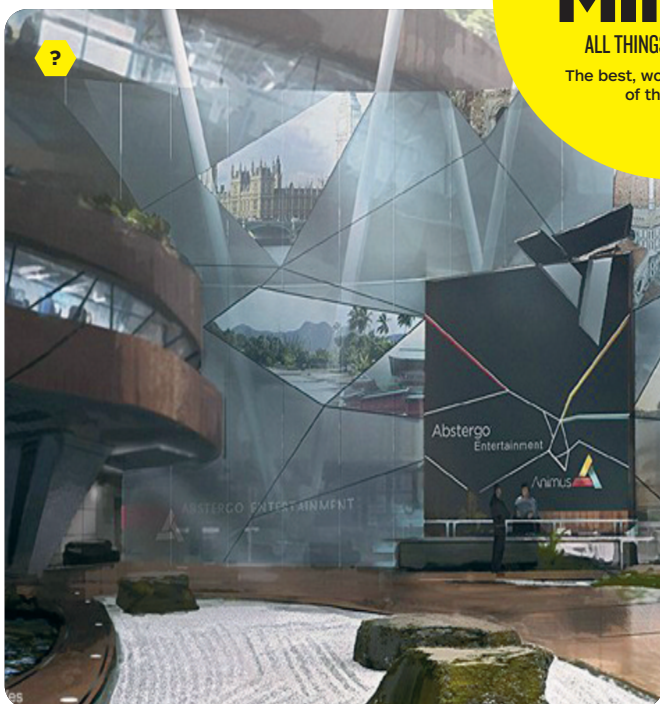
SID MEIER'S RETURN 2K and Firaxis have announced a new Sid Meier's game. Starships is a turn-based, adventure-driven interstellar strategy game, where players command a fleet.



PLUS & MINUS

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

The best, worst and weirdest of the month.



HALO 3: ODST FREE FOR MCC PLAYERS

Halo 3: ODST will be remastered for Xbox One and then given free to players who played Halo: MCC between November 11 and December 19 by way of compensation following the botched launch of that game's multiplayer. Another freebie will be the Halo 2: Anniversary map Relic, which will drop as part of a free content update. Again, 60fps and in 1080p, and like other Anniversary maps, fully remastered. Certain Affinity will be working on that.

NO SECOND VITA UNCHARTED

Former Sony Bend artist Athey Moravetz detailed projects and concepts he worked on, which included work on a second Uncharted title for PS Vita: "It was going to be another Uncharted game but Naughty Dog was worried about franchise burnout with so many games coming out so close together, so they nixed it. We spent a whole year dicking around with different ideas and pitches after that before I left the studio."

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG HEADING EAST?

In the official Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag art book, an image showing the lobby of the Abstergo building (in the game's modern day setting) shows a wall featuring promotional art, one of which is especially interesting: it's the only one that doesn't have a direct connection with any released/upcoming game. The image shows what looks like a temple, most likely Japanese or Chinese, something we have yet to encounter in the games.

WESTEROS MADE IN MINECRAFT

About two years ago, it was reported that a group of Game of Thrones fans were building King's Landing in Minecraft and the result was impressive. Since then the project seems to have inspired more GoT fans and they are now building the entire continent of Westeros, with 125 people working on it. In fact, not only have they been adding more cities and content, they have since rebuilt King's Landing to make it closer to the original version.

ROBOTOKI HIATUS Rob Bowling's studio, Robotoki, has shut down and their ambitious first-person shooter, Human Element, has been put on ice. The studio are looking for a new publisher.



06

THINGS ABOUT...

Play the numbers game with the latest news

FUTURE MICROSOFT

Company plans to bring together PC and console platforms and introduce HoloLens.

1 MULTI-PLATFORM

During January's Windows 10 briefing in Redmond, Washington, Xbox Chief Phil Spencer had plenty of interesting things to say about how the upcoming PC platform would integrate with the Xbox ecosystem in the coming years. Windows 10 (they're skipping Windows 9) will be linked across a variety of different platforms, from PC to tablets, and of course with a presence on Xbox One.

2 CROSS-PLAY

Fable Legends was confirmed as the first triple A game that will be cross-play between PC and Xbox One gamers. The 4vs1 multiplayer offering from Lionhead Studios will also launch simultaneously on both platforms at some point in 2015. Spencer then confirmed that the game will be available on PC exclusively on the Windows 10 platform, so bad news if you're reluctant to upgrade from Windows 7 or 8.

3 APP THAT

Microsoft announced a new app for Windows 10 that would bring the platform closer to the console. There'll be crossover between the two when it comes to gaming, Friends lists and activity lists, messaging, notifications, and Achievements. We'll also be able to stream Xbox One gameplay direct to Windows 10 PCs or tablets, as well as capture and edit gameplay clips via the built-in Game DVR feature.

4 HOLOLENS

Oculus Rift is well on the way to market, and Sony has Project Morpheus in development. Microsoft's response is to walk a slightly different path, and that's their upcoming HoloLens technology. The futuristic-looking headset allows the user to see augmented reality in the home, and will feature built-in surround sound. Microsoft are calling it "the most advanced holographic computer the world has ever seen."

5 BETTER GAMING

"We know that we have fans and gamers who also play on PC and phone and it's important that we build out the features that we have, learning from what we've done on console and helping making Windows 10 the best operating system we've ever created for gamers on PCs", Phil Spencer said. Bold words that point to ambitious plans for the platform holder in the long-neglected PC space.

6 FUTURE SEEN

The reveal included a demonstration of Microsoft's recent acquisition, Minecraft, playable via the HoloLens headset. Frankly, it looks incredible. We were also told that HoloLens will be powered by an independent GPU and CPU, with a third processor solely for creating holograms, thus it's tech that won't drain the processing power of your PC. The wireless headset will launch during the life cycle of Windows 10.

TESO ON CONSOLE DATED

The Elder Scrolls MMO to drop subscriptions.

The MMORPG from Zenimax Online Studios is to get a new edition and has a release date on consoles, with the long-awaited Xbox One and PlayStation 4 versions of the game finally getting released on June 9.

The new edition, Tamriel Unlimited, will include all the updates and content additions to have landed on the PC and Mac versions so far.

Perhaps more significantly, the PC and Mac versions of the new edition will launch on March 17, and their arrival will herald the abandonment of the monthly subscription charges that players currently have to pay.

A subscription service, ESO Plus, will be available, and players with active subs will automatically be transferred to the new system on March 17. It will grant players exclusive items and an in-game allowance, plus access to all future DLC game packs.

"Our fans are our biggest inspiration, and we've listened to their feedback on the entertainment experience they want," said game director Matt Firor.

"We know that Elder Scrolls fans want choice when it comes to how they play and how they pay, and that is what they will get. We have made numerous changes to the game over the past year, and are confident this is a game that Elder Scrolls fans will love to play."



GUILD WARS 2 EXPANSION ArenaNet has announced the first full expansion to their MMORPG, Guild Wars 2, and it's called Heart of Thorns. Expect plenty of new content when it lands.



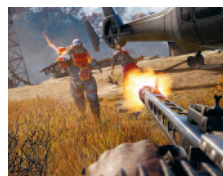
YOUR DLC UPDATE

The latest in digital downloadable goodness this month.

Evolve's headlined DLC talk this month. The game's not your standard shooter, nor is the DLC plan straightforward.

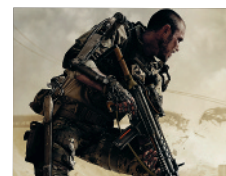
Fans who pre-purchase any edition will unlock the Evolve Monster Expansion Pack, and this will see you get an extra monster - Behemoth - sometime after launch, and an extra monster skin (on Xbox One a pre-purchase unlocks the Wraith and Hunter Team C from the start). There's a season pass that'll grant an extra four hunters (which can also be bought individually), and more monster skins - you can also get this content as part of the Digital Deluxe Edition.

Finally there's the PC-only Monster Race Edition, and that includes two more hunters and a selection of monster skins, plus a fifth monster after launch. Of course, all of this content can be picked up individually at a premium price. Luckily all the maps are free, and you can still fight against DLC characters you haven't bought, so at least that's simple enough.



FAR CRY 4

The first bits of DLC for the Far Cry Season Pass are in. Escape from Durgesh Prison is a repurposed take on the second half of Kyrat, and the player must get to the extraction point within the time limit and escape. The twist: permadeath. Every time you die you keep your gear, but go back to the start. Most recent was the five missions in the Hurk Deluxe DLC.



CALL OF DUTY

Havoc (they're going to run out of punchy one-word titles at this rate) has landed for Advanced Warfare. This first DLC includes new multiplayer maps, and more excitingly the first part of the co-op focused Exo Zombies mode, which this time is being brought to life by some serious Hollywood talent, including John Malkovich and Bill Paxton.



DYING LIGHT

Another of this month's big releases also gets a DLC pass. Zombie fans will be able to play two missions - Cuisine and Cargo - set inside corridor-filled sealed off buildings; a nice change of pace to the open-world offering of the main game. Also included is a wave attack mode called The Bozak Horde, and the Ultimate Survivor Bundle (outfits, blueprints, and in-game items).



ELITE: DANGEROUS

The biggest omission when it came to Elite: Dangerous was some robust social features, but they're coming in early 2015 in the Wings beta update. This new feature should allow players to band together in small parties and take to the stars to wage war, smuggle contraband, mine minerals, engage in piracy, or whatever else it is you want to do in the game.

YOU SAID WHAT?

A CULTURED GUIDE TO GAMING TERMINOLOGY



TURTLING

A strategy employed in both fighting games and in real-time strategies. Turtling involves a very defensive approach to a game. In a fighter it involves plentiful blocking, and waiting patiently for an opportunity to strike. In RTS games it means building well-defended bases that can withstand an early attack and holding back until you're finally strong enough to go on the offensive.



KILL STEALING

An unpopular practise whereby one player will invest time and effort into killing a high-powered opponent, only to have another player swan in and apply the final, killing shot, thereby taking the rewards for killing said opponent, whether that be XP in an MMO, or a point in a first-person shooter. Perhaps more frustrating in MMOs due to the extensive health bars of some enemies.



LET'S PLAY

Let's Play videos tend to appear on YouTube or Twitch, and feature someone playing a game while offering commentary on the title in question. Programming quality varies, as does the tone, with some screaming and shouting, others going for laughs, and others playing it very straight. PewDiePie (pictured) is probably the most popular person working in the area currently.



BROWSER GAME

A browser game is a title that can be played in one's internet browser, and doesn't rely on the gamer downloading a title to their hard drive. As such browser games make for an excellent distraction during work hours, where a player can, on the company computer, instantly access a game and play. Many are casual, but more recently shooters like Warface have tried to attract core gamers.



PAPER DOLL

Many role-playing games use a paper doll inventory system, whereby the player can see a picture of their character and add or remove items of clothing, armour or weapons. Usually this is done via dragging said items and placing them where required, and it offers a nice overview of a character's loadout. It's an intuitive system, and favoured in old-style RPGs and action-RPGs.

TREYARCH BACK ON CALL OF DUTY While it's of little surprise, Treyarch are up next for the annual Call of Duty release. The studio's new work will be out later this year.



EVOLVE 10 FEBRUARY

Out by the time you read this (and reviewed this issue), Turtle Rock's 4 v 1 sci-fi multiplayer is the first big triple-A release of 2015 and also one of its biggest gambles. Putting aside the convoluted DLC pre-order plan that needs a whiteboard and plenty of post-it notes to work out, getting the best out of the experience hinges on other players (and yourself, for that matter) playing as a team to survive. Something that might not work well with a casual drop-in on a weekend evening. However, that never stopped Left 4 Dead turning into an online behemoth, and with a lot of specialist skills needing learnt to perfect the hunt, there's enough here to keep us playing.



RESIDENT EVIL REVELATIONS 2 20 MARCH

Played Resident Evil HD and eager for more zombie goodness? Skip ahead several years into the franchise's story and get up to date with this latest entry as the series goes episodic, and welcome the return of Claire Redfield. While the episodes will be released digitally over the coming weeks, a boxed retail version, collecting the entire story on one disc, will hit store shelves in March.



MAJORA'S MASK 13 FEBRUARY

If you're picking this issue up in your local GAME store, look to your left or right and you should spot your next purchase for your 3DS. Releasing the same day as this magazine, this reinvented makeover joins its older brother Ocarina of Time on Nintendo's handheld. As with most of Nintendo's back catalogue it hardly shows signs of age - and even those have been touched up to make this portable adventure wrinkle-free.



FINAL FANTASY TYPE-0 20 MARCH

The first Final Fantasy game to hit the new-gen consoles is a remake of a four-year old PSP game with overhauled graphics and the main multiplayer element cut out. You control a class of students flying all over the world on missions against a warring empire. With a darker tone than most of the rest of the franchise, don't write this one off yet.



THE ORDER 1886 20 FEBRUARY

One of Sony's big PS4 exclusives finally rolls out of cover this month as the third-person shooter finally launches. The Victorian stylings of an alternate history London are the backdrop to a clash between gun-wielding knights and half-breed monsters.



DMC: DEFINITIVE EDITION 10 MARCH

Another game makes the leap from old to new-gen as Ninja Theory's take on Capcom's (other) monster hunter gets the 60fps, 1080p treatment and some rebalanced gameplay.



BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE 20 MARCH

Is different better? Can a new angle stop franchise fatigue? That's what EA and developer Visceral Games are hoping for with Hardline, as Battlefield does cops vs criminals. The recent beta at least showed promise in that the studio is listening to player feedback, and an early year launch may net Battlefield gamers tiring of last winter's Halo and Call of Duty entries.

NEW-GEN BORDERLANDS

Next title in the works as two-game pack comes to PS4 and Xbox One

Borderlands: The Handsome Collection is coming to PS4 and Xbox One. The pack includes the best-selling Borderlands 2, Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel, along with all released DLC for both games. That's one massive package of co-operative loot 'em up action. A nice added bonus for returning players is the ability to import your character files to the new-gen versions. The game is due out March 27.

Gearbox Software president Randy Pitchford confirmed at PAX South that work has begun on a new Borderlands at the studio. Publisher 2K Games has confirmed that the next instalment will be exclusive to new-gen platforms (and PC presumably) and they also went on to mention the franchise has sold an impressive 23 million copies to date.



THE NEW 3DS LAUNCHES

The New 3DS has hit the UK.

The new handheld is more than just a cosmetic upgrade of the Nintendo console, boasting a few new tricks under the hood. Headlining the new features is an improved 3D system, with a sensor tracking your head movements to position the 3D correctly no matter how you are holding the device (within reason), meaning you are no longer locked into a narrow space in front of the screen to enjoy the third dimension.

A C-stick now sits over the face buttons, allowing - as in the case of Majora's Mask - for easier camera pans in-game, while an improved CPU speeds up powering on the console and activating Apps.

The system has swapped the SD memory cards of previous iterations for a Micro-SD (a 4GB version comes bundled with the system) so if you're a digital hog you'll need to upgrade quickly. Additionally the console doesn't come with a power adaptor - you need to buy one separately.

YOUR
GENRE
HISTORY

THIS MONTH: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

ANCIENT ART OF WAR

Released: 1984



Developed by Eryware in 1984, The Ancient Art of War is considered

one of the very first real-time strategy games. Using four unit types - knights, archers, barbarians and spies - players engage in rock, paper, scissors style gameplay. Other early examples include Cytron Masters (1982) and Bokosuka Wars (1983).

HERZOG ZWEI

Released: 1989



A Mega Drive-exclusive from Technosoft, Herzog Zwei released in

1989. Slower than a typical modern-day RTS, the player controlled a transforming mech and then issued orders to units on the ground. Plenty of micromanagement and solid co-op made this a cult favourite among Sega-owning console gamers.

COMMAND & CONQUER

Released: 1995



This spot could have easily been filled by Dune II, which was developed by the

same studio and acted as a precursor to C&C. Both are classics, although it was 1995's Command & Conquer that would build on Dune II's ideas and really perfect the formula. Also memorable thanks to the brilliant/terrible live-action trailers.

COMPANY OF HEROES

Released: 2006



Relic made some notable advances in the genre. Company of Heroes put players

in control of smaller forces and featured capture points linked to resources. Previously a genre standard was resource gathering and base-building, but games like CoH and Petroglyph's Star Wars: Empire at War (both 2006) changed things.

STARCRAFT II

Released: 2010



The first part of Blizzard's sci-fi real-time strategy series released in 2010, and

the third and final chapter is only now on the horizon, with each new offering rebalancing and tweaking the formula. Warcraft may have spawned the MOBA genre, but StarCraft and its sequels have their own thriving eSports scene.

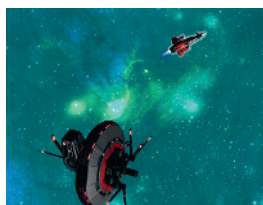
PRISON ESCAPE

Alongside confirming that Prison Architect will be releasing sometime in 2015, Introversion confirmed that a mobile version of the gaol house builder is also in the works.

POCKET GAMING THIS MONTH

A thumb through the titles that are trying to hog your mobile screens.

Is WWE not silly enough for you? The studio responsible for the Mortal Kombat franchise has taken some creative license to create a title unlike any other, WWE Immortals. Wrestlers from around the world fight for dominance outside of the ring and accidentally open up alternate dimensions. This means that several well known wrestlers have turned into super heroes (and villains naturally) equipped with super powers. Time to settle the score in three man tag-team battles. Netherrealm know their way around mobile gaming, with virtual buttons replaced by simple swipe controls, where the only "button" is dedicated to special attacks that when activated deal bonus damage based on your swipes and presses – a great control scheme. Naturally there's the option of taking the battle online and earn virtual coins to spend on upgrades. The freemium model appears fair as the hunt for cards is the main way in which the game hopes to convince you to part with your cash. This won't get in the way of enjoying the game. If you're the kind of player who constantly switches out fighters you may be forced to take breaks due to the energy system. We've spent many nights swiping away with some wrestling stars; it might be silly, but it's well crafted. We definitely recommend a download on either Android or iOS.



PlanCon: Space Conflict

IOS PRICE: £2.29

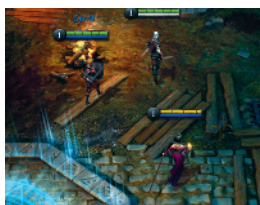
First impressions can be misleading. PlanCon doesn't seem anything special on first firing it up, but proves an enjoyable title that offers an old school mix of Galaxy on Fire and Elite. Venus and Earth are the only two planets mankind holds after a war. Rumours of an incoming alien attack forces humanity into an offensive push; this is where you come in. The adventure lets you explore, scavenge wreckages, recruit crew members, trade, perform escort missions, take out enemies and do mercenary work.



HERO EMBLEMS

IOS PRICE: £3.49

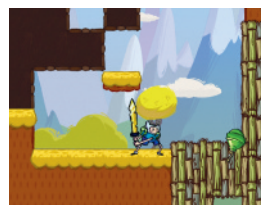
It's classic Puzzle & Dragons style entertainment, with nice graphics, brilliant music, and well-crafted mechanics. You match gems in order to upgrade your team of warriors and you get to follow a group of adventurers on a quest to save a kingdom. There's a wealth of sub-mechanics that spice up the gem-matching and it offers more depth than most of its competitors. Add to that a quality story and a large open-world and it's clear we have a winner on our hands.



THE WITCHER BATTLE ARENA

IOS / ANDROID PRICE: FREE

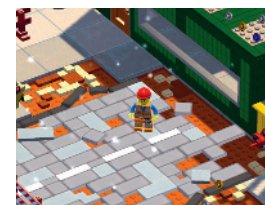
This MOBA spinoff offers a gamer-friendly freemium model you'll know from games like Vainglory and League of Legends. It delivers action-fuelled chaos that reminds us of equal parts Call of Duty and League of Legends. While it's interesting, we're sticking with Vainglory for the time being. But, as it's a free download, you should go ahead and queue it up on your device and try it out for yourself. We've been curious how this would end up and as it stands it's surprisingly good, and worth a look if you love the genre.



ADVENTURE TIME GAME WIZARD

IOS / ANDROID PRICE: £3.99

This is a side-scrolling platformer where you jump, collect stuff and switch between the two characters. It offers some metroidvania elements and solid touch and swipe controls. The main potential here lies in the creation part. You can easily make your own levels, pick ready-made enemies and traps or draw them yourself. As you're able to upload your creations this game will provide plenty of entertainment over time. Again it's a premium title (£3.99), but there's great value here.



THE LEGO MOVIE VIDEOGAME

IOS PRICE: £3.99

Playing as Emmet you'll jump around, solving minor puzzles, smash enemies and build stuff. It's the typical mix of enjoyable mechanics we've come to expect from Lego titles mixing hack n' slash, vehicle levels and a bunch of characters to play with. You can opt between a virtual joystick or tapping the screen to move and attack. There's some great design choices made and there are lots of challenges and content to unlock. If you're looking for a premium experience (£3.99), look no further.

NO MAN'S SKY

i

Art

The video game visual discussed.

Hello Games art director **GRANT DUNCAN** discusses 70s sci-fi inspiration.

"No Man's Sky is the game that we wanted to play when we were kids, this huge universe that you're free to explore. Back then I was reading a lot of sci-fi, and a lot of my memories of those stories set on alien planets are all about the covers of the books, those colourful 1970s worlds which I would pore over, just imagining what could be really out there.

That's what we wanted No Man's Sky to be inspired by. Science fiction in games is so often bleak and dark, with grey space marines battling with grey aliens, and while we genuinely like a lot of those games, we wanted to make a universe that feels different, something full of hope and wonder, that's always fresh and you want to go out and explore.

We also wanted to make it a believable place. We don't want it to be realistic, because it needs to inspire wonder, but on the other hand it can be very easy to slip into crazy, silly stuff, like blobby tentacle beasts. We want you to feel that each planet you explore is a real place, so we found it turns out that our own planet is filled with weird, fantastic places and creatures, like limestone pools and deep sea creatures.

All these inspirations are part of the procedural generation system that we've been building. We've been creating super-complex sets of rules that determine how to place things like plants and rocks in certain contexts, which means they make sense and avoid that random look that people tend to associate with procedural generation. It's been amazing to see us getting really close to that artistic look that I've loved for so long."

No Man's Sky is (hopefully) heading to PS4 later this year as a timed exclusive.







DEVELOPER STORIES

Creative Assembly's Mike Simpson looks back on some glorious victories and narrow defeats for the creators of Total War.

How have the successes at the studio affected your outlook looking forward?

I think we've always got a very positive and ambitious viewing looking forward. We've always tried to make sure that if anybody beats one of our products, releasing something similar that's better, it's us and not someone else. So rather than resting on our laurels and producing the same game with different content, we don't do that, we make the game very different each time and we're ambitious doing that. Even to the point of stumbling sometimes, if we're too ambitious. But I'd rather do that than not have any ambition at all. I think in the long run the players prefer that as well, it keeps the franchise alive.

As time's gone on we've started spreading out sideways now. It's taken us a long time for us to get to

point where we can actually do that, where we can start looking at things like multiplayer, free-to-play, moving onto other platforms as well. It's all very exciting actually.

It feels like Creative Assembly has taken a big step up in the last twelve months. Would you agree with that assessment?

I think we have finally got to a point where we can really successfully do more than one thing at a time. That's the difference, because in the past we always focused on the current product and the next big game and more or less having everybody working on that at the same time. We've been growing the team gradually so we can get to the point where we can start splitting chunks off. So a little digital team, and there's twenty guys in that, and separating off the

[Total War:] Arena guys so they're their own team. And then having a separate ongoing content team for the main game as well, so even after the main game has been released we keep working on it, we keep producing more content for it.

With Total War do you have a defined longterm goal, or do you just plan to continue expanding outwards?

They're both true, in that we do have a longterm vision, but it changes regularly. It's like all plans; none of them ever survive contact with the enemy, and we constantly revise our longterm plan. I guess the change in strategy, if there has been one, is having got to the point where we can do multiple things at once, is starting to step sideways. Just doing more traditional Total War. Most of these things are things we've always wanted to do, we just never had the effort available to do it. I think we've finally got to the point where we have.

With the added clout of Sega and that relationship, how much has that helped you grow the company and realise your ambitions?

It's hard now to remember back to what it was like being an independent developer, but it's very, very different. When you're independent you bet the whole farm on every game you make. If you make a bad one, you might survive one, you'll never survive two. So you're constantly in danger of basically coming to an end. Having a big publisher behind us like Sega makes that all go away. I mean we have a different set of problems, but Sega is brilliant and just leaves us to get on with what we want to do and they let us do what we want. You can't ask for any more than that really. So yes, it's been fantastic.

"It's like all plans; none of them ever survive contact with the enemy, and we constantly revise our longterm plan."

We're dancing around the elephant in the room here, but is there any other IP or series that you think would lend itself well to the Total War formula?

It's an interesting question. I guess anything that has the kind of things Total War needs, could be fitted into it. And they're things like cool content, that's the first thing, it needs to be something interesting. Any kind of strategy game needs some content, or a period of history or whatever, that has some element of progression in it. With our historical games we're always looking for periods in history where there's rapid technological change, because that drives the tech

FIRST VICTORY The studio's first Total War game was Shogun: Total War (2000), and it was a departure for a team that had previously, among other things, worked on porting EA Sports games to MS DOS.



tree and gives you the progress you need. The third ingredient you need is a period of history or content where there are lots of different factions that are vying for ultimate power, where in the real world or the real fiction or whatever it is, where one of them ends up dominating. So those are the three things you need to make a Total War game. Oh, and ideally it needs to be combat on an epic scale. That epic scale is a big part of the Total War thing. There are loads of different IPs and periods of history and so on that would fit that template. So yes, in theory you could apply that to many, many different things. In practice we're limited by what we've got the people to do. And I guess the other guiding principle is we make the games we want to play. We don't try and second guess what other people want and make a game that we think might appeal. We just make things that we want to play, and that seems to work pretty well for us.

You mentioned a lot of different elements there. Do you pick a period of history and then look for a way in, or do you read broadly and let the historical periods pick themselves?

We effectively have a list. We have a constant list of things that we would like to do one day, and the different periods of history, the different places around the world that match our criteria one way or another, and we just argue about the order on the list, and eventually we're going to get to all of them. It's going to take a while, but I'm sure we will cover everything eventually. So it's just a case of the order in which we

do stuff.

Is there anything particularly modern on this list?

Modern's interesting. Modern, when you start getting into the 20th century, the game engines that currently stand can deal with it to some extent but would need quite major revisions to deal with it well. I think we could make a World War 1 game with our current technology, but I don't think a World War 1 game would be much fun. Fun is not a world you'd normally associate with World War 1; there's something too raw and unpleasant about that whole period, which makes it difficult. World War 2 is obviously a much more popular time to set a game in, but the scale is completely different to the type of thing our engine does, so we would have to do something completely different for that. So yes, we do talk about modern era from time to time. It's on the list, don't know when we're going to get to that. It could be a long time.

You had a tough time in the wake of the release of Total War: Rome II. How has that affected you as a studio and how has that impacted your outlook?

Well, I mean like all things, at the end of a project we'll have a post-mortem and generally we'll come up with a list of things say "well, we're not going to do that again". So we ended up with a fair number of things on that list. But I've said before that there are constraints that we have to work to, we reach points where we have to commit to dates, and you can't stop. It's like shooting clay pigeons. You actually pull the trigger

quite a long time before the bullet hits the bird. And sometimes you pull the trigger too early and you're committed, and you fall foul of your ambition. And that happened to some extent with Rome II, and it's taken us a while to catch up from that. I think any of the players that played the Emperor Edition should be pretty pleased with that, and certainly from a commercial point of view it's the most successful game we've ever made. It's tricky, getting that balance right between ambition and the fact that you do have fixed constraints, and the more ambitious you are the more vulnerable you are to events knocking you off course right at the end. It can be quite small things that end up doing that: a key person gets ill or somebody leaves to go back to their family in another country; these are the kinds of things that you have to deal with and sometimes at the last minute that can really mess you up.

What was your first gaming experience?

My first ever ever was playing Pong in an airport somewhere when I was... I don't know, I don't know how old I was then. Not very old. [Laughs] I was kid somewhere, going A to B, and there was Pong in an airport somewhere, and I thought "Wow".

"You we do talk about modern era from time to time. It's on the list, don't know when we're going to get to that. It could be a long time."

What's your preference, console or PC?

Personal preference for games? I probably prefer PC, but that's not a console versus PC thing, because most of the games I play for fun tend to be MMOs of one form or another, and most of them happen to be on PC. So it's more a question of do I like games with lots of other humans in, and the answer to that is yes.



SECOND STRING? After finishing work on *Viking: Battle for Asgard*, the console team at CA began to prototype a new concept for a sci-fi movie tie in. This became *Alien: Isolation*.



How big is your gaming collection?

It's quite big, but it's not vast. I think that there's two different kinds of gamers. You get some gamers who play a lot of games a little bit, and you get people who play fewer games but play them obsessively. I'm more in the last category. So there are games that I've played for years which I still play. I play *Eve [Online]* still, for example. So yes, I probably rack up more hours than games in my collection, if you see what I mean.

What's your current gaming obsession?

I'm going to sound partisan actually. I've got kind of addicted to [*Total War: Kingdom*, which is a bit of a surprise because I tend to be a bit of a hardcore gamer, and *Kingdom* is probably the lightest thing we've ever made, and I've just got kind of obsessed with it.

“There's two different kinds of gamers. You get some gamers who play a lot of games a little bit, and you get people who play fewer games but play them obsessively. I'm in the last category.”

If you weren't in the industry, what would you be doing?

Before I was in the industry I made, I was a chip designer making the inside of telephone exchanges. I don't know if I'd still be doing that, because having done a couple of those I thought it was a bit dull, which I was I quit and started writing games. If I stopped now I don't know what I do, medical research probably, or something like that.

Is there anybody in the industry that you particularly admire?

That's interesting because in general that's never been the case with me, I'm not really a fan of anyone or anything, but I went to a couple of GDC talks done by Brenda Brathwaite. I don't know if you know her, but she's John Romero's wife. But that's not why she's good. She's just a great game designer. She does board games as well as computer games. She did a talk about a board game she'd made based on the holocaust. I mean, how can you possibly make a game based on the holocaust, right? You'd say that was one subject that you just cannot do, but she's made a board game which was absolutely brilliant and it had been endorsed by various rabbis as being a work of the Torah, because it opened people's eyes to how something like that could possibly happen. And I thought that was absolutely genius, so yeah, I guess I'd probably be a fan of hers.

Do you have a personal highlight, or a moment in your career, that's particularly important to you?

That's interesting... I like winning awards... I just like winning awards [laughs all around]. So I guess various awards ceremonies and going up and grabbing that award and grabbing it for the team.

“I've got kind of addicted to *Total War: Kingdom*, which is a bit of a surprise because I tend to be a bit of a hardcore gamer, and *Kingdom* is probably the lightest thing we've ever made.”

How do you blow off steam when you're not working?

I play games.

Do you have an amusing story from within the industry that you like to bust out at parties?

I probably have a few, but how amusing they are is purely subjective. Earlier I was remembering a time when I was working at Microsoft as part of the Mirror Group, where we were working late and the phone rang and a guy in the accounts department actually picked the phone up and it was Robert Maxwell. And Robert Maxwell asked where the boss was and the guy in accounts didn't know and he fired him for not knowing where the boss was. I don't know whether that counts as amusing? Actually, that's not particularly funny, somebody actually lost their job. I probably ought to think of one of those and have it ready; the amusing anecdote of the day.

Creative Assembly's next game, *Total War: Attila*, is heading to PC on February 17.





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COMING SOON

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

DOWN SIGHTS

Halo 5 will come with an aim-down-sight system. Don't worry, it works, and it also breathes new life into the assault rifle.

Halo 5: Guardians is shaping up to be a return to form. Having spent much of the holiday period playing the beta for Halo 5, we can safely say that we liked what we saw. This is Halo once again in its purest form, none of the over-complicated loadouts and unnecessary tinkering, but a back to basics approach to the series that fans have been crying out for.

The formula is now much simpler than before, and there's a reassuring feeling of balance to the newly assembled systems. Spartans all take to the battlefield sporting the same equipment, and with the same strengths and weaknesses. We're now looking at the return of what made Halo so unique and enjoyable; it's about the skills you take to the fight, not the loadout you have prepared.

Movement around the maps is slick. The new mantle makes moving up onto ledges a more natural interaction, and you can slide and sprint and hover in the air (you can also, when hovering, unleash a powerful ground attack - this is possibly the only feature we're not totally sold on as yet). This new found mobility is shared between all players, and it makes for a more level playing field as a result. There's a sporty feeling to the competition, which manifests itself with high fives and frat boy callouts mid-game. We liked the sporty feel, less the voice-over work.

But we'll forgive a couple of minor annoyances if 343i can get the basics right, and from what we've seen, they're on track to deliver a stunning Halo game later this year. The studio has got plenty of time to make sure that they deliver a title worthy of the franchise, and given the absolute debacle that was the launch of the online side of Halo: The Master Chief Collection, they've no option but to get this one right. Failure to knock it out the park would be nothing less than a disaster. So, no pressure then.

Having played for several hours already, we're confident that they're going to do it. The new ranking system sounds good, player movement is improved, and the level playing field that made Halo 2 and Halo 3 best-in-class has returned.

Genre ACTION Dev 343 INDUSTRIES Publisher MICROSOFT Release 2015



RESOURCEFUL

Resources are relatively scarce. You'll need conserve ammo and search for health. The best choice may often be to avoid open conflict with the Skaven if you can.

WARHAMMER VERMINTIDE

As we arrived at the Fatshark offices in Stockholm we were clueless. We had absolutely no idea what was in store for us. Sure we knew they were working on a Warhammer tie-in. But what kind of game was it? Fatshark has made everything from multiplayer shooters to puzzle games, via medieval third-person combat games, retro platformers and action-RPGs. The answer was something far removed from the turn-based strategy origins of the license.

Warhammer: The End Times - Vermintide, to give the game its full title, is based on an apocalyptic event in the world of Warhammer, currently playing out in a series of tie-in novels. Vermintide takes place in the city of Ubersreik at the beginning of the End Times. The Skaven, a race of ratmen, have taken over the city as our heroes arrive, who now have to fight for their survival. Each hero (5 in total) has a unique story and background that players will experience via dialogue prior to and during missions. We were introduced to two heroes, a Witch Hunter called Victor and a Bright Wizard called Sienna. Victor is out to get the Skaven for personal reasons as they ate one of his eyes, and the characters all have different motivations that don't necessarily have to do with saving the city.

Every facet of the game has been designed with teamwork in mind. You're only rewarded with

loot if you succeed in accomplishing the main objective for instance, no points for killing the most enemies or rushing ahead. In fact if you go at it alone you could end up in some serious trouble; one class of Elites – the Packmaster – has a rod he uses to capture and drag one player away with. This player is now helpless to do anything if another player doesn't take out said Packmaster. Naturally you can fill different class roles as a tank, but you're always equipped with both a ranged and a melee weapon so you're never out options. And since the Skaven attack from all sides as well as from above and below, your role may have to switch depending on where the danger is. They're an interesting enemy, unlike zombies and orcs, and perhaps the strongest aspect of the game from what we've seen thus far.

Genre ACTION Dev FATSHARK Publisher FATSHARK Release 2015



GOING SOLO

Despite the popularity of the multiplayer mod for Just Cause 2, Avalanche are keeping JC3 single-player. Instead there will be lots of asynchronous challenges.

JUST CAUSE 3

The Just Cause franchise has managed to carve out a unique niche of its own. It's no longer being compared to GTA as it's far more focused on physics, explosions, mayhem and ridiculous stunts. Just Cause 3 is something of a homecoming for the international man of mystery that is Rico Rodriguez. Set on the fictional Mediterranean island of Medici, this is also where Rico is from. There's a dictator to remove from office, militias and military forces to take out, but it is also very clear that the story is secondary to the sandbox action. In fact, the developers only spent a sentence or two on story and setting as the game was presented to us.

The wonderful combination of parachute and grappling hook is now joined by a wingsuit. While the parachute now acts as more of a slow and stable platform from which to shoot down from, the wingsuit will allow for some death-defying aerial stunts as you grapple to propel yourself along at insane speeds. Much work has gone into optimising animations and transitions, with the idea being that Rico should always be able to quickly switch between states and that the player should always be able to use his weapons. As in Just Cause 2 you have a choice of one-handed weapons to dual wield and two-handed weapons – additionally you can now carry a heavy weapon on your back as

well (it's no longer a limited pick-up) and Rico now has limitless access to C4. More weapons, more vehicles, more chaos. And everything is available at the press of a button – airdrops are much quicker and you'll no longer have to save up load of currency for a fancy car that really just only want so you can drive it off a cliff. Dual-tethering is now triple-tethering and the developers are toying with the idea of adding even more lines to enable even crazier stunts.

One of the franchise's strong points is its technical foundation, and Just Cause 3 is no exception. We got our hands-on an early pre-alpha version and it still looked amazing, the scale is second to none. They've still to flesh out the world of Medici with props, missions, vehicles and objectives, but what we experienced showed a lot of promise.

Genre ACTION Dev AVALANCHE Publisher SOAURE ENIX Release 2015



SINGLE PLAYER

One side of Hardline we're still waiting to experience is the single player campaign. Given the concept of the game, hopefully we'll get some dynamic storytelling and setpieces.

BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE

After sinking some serious hours into the recent beta, Hardline's looking better. The different take on Battlefield will still feature some of the franchise's licks, as both grander and more intimate maps will be featured, as well as a wide selection of weapons and drivable vehicles. But now we're getting into the action faster than ever before. Forget about that slow minute of walking through hillsides and vegetation and staring at distant enemies through your scope. This also means the ebb and flow of the matches are less predictable. The maps are tighter, the front lines always flowing, danger is ever present.

We remember how the range and size was the biggest single problem with Hardline last time we sampled it during last summer's open beta. It screamed the need to satisfy the hardcore Battlefield audience as it lacked accessibility. Visceral Games has listened keenly to the feedback and there are major changes thanks to the extended development time. There are now fewer and more dependable weapons. A more subtle use of Levolution. A new distribution model for playable classes to balance out ease of use (making Assault less dominant). An economy system where you buy the equipment you want without having to rise in rank.

Hotwire, the game mode in which, as criminals, we gain points the longer we stay in stolen vehicles as cops try and stop us, has grown on us over time, at its best offering the kind of moment-to-moment entertainment that highlights the playful side of the Battlefield. A side of Battlefield many players haven't seen before.

Heist situations offer great potential, especially with the help of clever level design that encourages team play. The game forces us to think in terms we normally don't Battlefield. Objectives are more important than just capping some points on the map. There is a distinct difference in equipment between robbers and cops, and Hardline now feels like a legitimate, very promising new side series, thanks to tighter and more focused gameplay. The longer development time is starting to pay off.

Genre FPS Dev VISCERAL GAMES Publisher EA Release MARCH 19 2015



THE WITCHER 3

WILD HUNT

AFTER MULTIPLE TRAILERS AND DELAYS, WE FINALLY GET
A TASTE OF CPR'S OPEN WORLD RPG AS WE REJOIN
GERALT AT THE START OF HIS BIGGEST ADVENTURE YET...



Platform PC / PS4 / XBOX ONE Release: MAY 19 2015

Bandai Namco and CD Projekt Red are clearly very confident.

Such is the opulence of the event where we finally got to get our hands on *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. Normally the venues where these events are held play second fiddle to the games, but the publishers were laying it on thick and sparing no expense when it came to showing off their new RPG. They know this is a big title in the making, a potential game of the year contender, and they want us to know that they're pulling out all the stops. Nothing is being left to chance, and no stone is being left unturned.

The press trip takes us to Sterling Castle in Scotland. Once the seat of power for the Stewarts, the dynasty that would eventually become rulers of all Britain when James I ascended to the throne, the castle is magnificent and the view from its battlements is jaw-dropping. The link to the game, the reason we're here, is down to the inspiration that the

Scottish highlands gave to the developers when designing the open-world of the *The Witcher 3*. A strenuous link perhaps, but an impressive

"If CPR can deliver with Wild Hunt, we'll have a new RPG superpower on our hands."

backdrop nevertheless.

This boldness from Bandai Namco and CD Projekt Red, accentuated by the view from atop Sterling Castle, isn't without good reason. With *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* they made an excellent RPG that represented a rising power in Poland, a new studio with the potential to rival Bioware and Bethesda at the top table of western RPG creation. If CPR can deliver with *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, we'll have a new RPG superpower on our hands.

The decision to delay their game is another good indicator of the confidence emanating from the studio. Despite the obvious benefits of taking the extra time, holding back a project this ambitious is no mean feat. But they want it as polished as possible before it lands in the hands of players later this year. CPR will never have a better opportunity to make the step up, and they know it.

The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings was a combat-focused fantasy RPG set in several hub worlds, but despite their size they were ultimately beautifully decorated corridors. This is about to change, with the series finally going open-world in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. During the recent



press event we didn't get to see the open-world in all its glory, instead our hands-on time focused around two areas; the prologue section that culminated in a battle with an angry griffin, and an exploration of the Nordic-themed island, Ard Skellig.

Let's start with the prologue area, the place where all players will be able to cast off their training wheels and get to grips with the controls. Before the action started off in earnest we were shown the basic controls during a short introductory tutorial. Geralt of Rivia, our titular witcher, is in his quarters. We need to get out of the room, and pressing a button we use Geralt's witcher senses, revealing items of interest with icons or a shimmering red glow. We find the key needed to open the door, and go off to find another witcher, Vesemir, who sits asleep in his chair. Outside a girl is leaping between wooden posts while practising her swordplay.

Next we meet the girl, Ciri, a character that we already know we'll be controlling later on in the game, and together we race down to the training yard, learning more of the controls as we go. Then there's some combat practice, and it's not long before we're back in a groove well worn during



hours spent with Assassins of Kings.

Fast forward a few years. We're in a guesthouse asking the landlady if she's seen someone who was rumoured to have been in these parts recently. On her advice we then go about talking with some of the patrons, and in-between learning a new card game called Gwent, we get a couple of leads to follow.

These leads take us to the captain of the local Nilfgaardian garrison, and he knows where we need to go, but will only give us that information in exchange for the head of a troublesome griffin. And off we go, exploring this first hub-world, meeting the locals, fighting the wildlife, and taking on side-quests as we go. It's during this exploration that we're first blown away by the sheer amount of detail. At one point we note the mended tear on the clothes of an NPC character. At other moments we wonder how many devs were assigned the task of giving Geralt's ponytail its realistic swish.

When it comes to the side-quests there's a nice level of variety, at least as far as we could tell from this four hour introduction. We helped

an elderly woman who was missing a frying pan, and another mission had Geralt uncovering the culprit of a recent arson attack. Both side-quests were interesting for different reasons. One had a fairly straightforward, yet intriguing resolution, the other was less clear cut. The tragic backstory gave us food for thought, and no matter what choice was made, somebody would go on to get hurt. The stall is set out early; very few of the decisions you'll make are cut and dry.

Senior game design Damien Monnier explained: "We try to give each quest-giver or place a deep backstory. There are no fetch quests in the game, it's never a case of "kill ten of that a bring it to me", there's always a twist, and there's always something more down the rabbit hole. You'll see what I mean once you get your hands on the game."

We chewed through the story mission and some side-quests (there were more that we didn't get around to seeing, and talking with other journalists revealed a mix of shorter missions that we had yet to uncover), and before long we were setting up a trap for the griffin that



culminated in a tricky battle with our winged opponent. Witcher fans will be familiar with the strike and dodge approach to combat. Monstrous enemies are powerful and in a straight up fight they will undoubtedly win.

“Fans will be familiar with the strike and dodge approach to combat. Monstrous enemies are powerful and in a straight up fight they will undoubtedly win.”

Instead you have to attack, move fast, dodge and roll, and use the the witcher's spells - signs - to stun and injure your opponents.

Before the trap was sprung Vesemir handed us another new tool, a crossbow, which we proceeded to use to bring the griffin out of the sky as he swooped in to attack, as well as to chip

off little bits of health while we were too far away to attack with our sword. After achieving a hard-fought victory we went to turn in the head of the griffin to the local garrison and effectively end of this part of the demo, but CPR had more to show us and off we went to Skellige.

The island of Ard Skellig is The Witcher 3 at its most similar to The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim. It's windy, desolate, beautiful, snowing, and full of gnarly jarks. The accents are different (Irish here), but much is the same. It's one of several islands, but this is the largest and, by the looks of it, it's bigger than the entirety of Assassins of Kings. The demo starts with Geralt, dressed more respectfully, standing outside a huge castle, snow falling. We walk in through the guarded doors and initiate a quest line that's been prepared for us.

This time Geralt is hardier thanks to his level 15 stats,



and sometime later, after another tricky battle, there's two paths to choose from; resolve the quest by physical means, or by investigating the incident - CSI Wild Hunt - and following a trail back to the guilty party. We choose the latter, and upon the quest's completion the map opened up for us and we were able to explore the island.

The beasts you discover in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* don't scale according to Geralt's level, so when we came up to a clearing that was home to a level 30 earth elemental, our sword attacks were not even making a dent to its considerable health bar. After landing several hits and making no impression at all, it landed one hit and took off half of our health. We didn't need a second invitation and called our horse, Roach, who appeared shortly thereafter and whisked us away.

"Each monster is unique in its own way," says Monnier. "This means that it has different weak and strong sides you can use when you try to kill it. Sometimes an item you have will give you an advantage and you'll be able to get rid of a beast despite it being stronger than you at a given moment. I think this, combined with skill needed to kill more powerful beasts, will provide a nice blend of challenge and tactics."

Our exploration of Ard Skellig marked the end of our hands-on time with the demo, and for the most part we were very impressed with what we saw. The cutscenes, rendered in-engine, are framed

with cinematic flair, and the the voice-over that accompanies these scenes is of a high quality. Visually there's much to commend; from the character animations to the watercolour feel of the wider world (the local flora has a cel-shaded finish, likely a solution to the memory drain elsewhere, but an elegant one nevertheless).

That said, the console versions of the game on show during the event didn't compare to the PC version in one key area; screen tear. Apart from a little texture pop-up, the PC version was superior than the offerings on both PS4 and Xbox One in this regard. We asked Monnier if he thinks they'll have enough time to bring the console versions of *Wild Hunt* in-line with the PC version, but he disagreed with our assessment: "They are in-line with it! Yeah, the PC version will offer a few extra details like Nvidia Fur or different resolutions, but, in the grand scheme of things, we're pretty proud of what we managed to do with the game graphics-wise."

We won't argue with him there, CPR should be proud, all three versions of the game look fantastic. At this stage we're just splitting hairs about a couple of minor issues. And there's still three months for the studio to iron out any technical shortcomings if they can.

However, there is a couple of other things, such as lines of dialogue that went missing, and movement on horseback was occasionally frustrating, with Roach getting snagged on scenery and refusing to jump (the horse automatically follows the path most of the time, but if you go off-piste it can get tricky). Camera movement was sometimes disorientating. From time to time the hit detection felt a little off.

However, all of these issues are minor and fixable, and it reinforces the wisdom behind the decision the delay the game. There's still work to do if *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* is going to deliver an experience that is as polished as it is ambitious. However, there's no reason why it can't be done.

We came away from our four hour demo with a positive

"The open-world feels like a natural extension and it suits the IP down to the ground."

impression. From everything we've seen, which admittedly isn't much in the grand scheme of things, it appears that this trilogy closer builds on and improves almost every aspect of its predecessors.

There's a huge amount of depth which manifests itself most notably in side-quests and world design. But there's variety in the smaller details, such as some of the distractions you'll find along the way. The card game, *Gwent*, being a case in point. "We introduced *Gwent* because we wanted to give players something extra. Some of us in the studio are huge fans of card games, and we thought that it would be really awesome if we could include one in *The Witcher*. *Gwent* is a real game within a game, you can make your own decks and gather powerful cards while you play," Monnier explained.

The open-world that players will be exploring feels like a natural extension from the structure of *Assassins of Kings*. Simply put, it suits the IP right down to ground. Visually it's a splendour, but we came away more impressed with the character that the studio has woven into the overall experience, rather than any graphical flourish that they might have achieved. This is a grown-up game, with adult themes and thought-provoking ideas; more *Game of Thrones* than *Lord of the Rings*. This could be one of the best games of 2015.





MAJORA'S MASK

- TAKING OFF THE MASK - REMAKING THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Majora's Mask is one of the most beloved Zelda games, and certainly the most distinct. We talk to legendary creator [Eiji Aonuma](#) about the process of restoring a classic for a new generation of fans.

"You have just 72 hours to save the world". "You have just one year to create a fresh and unique twist on one of the greatest video games of all time". Which challenge is tougher? Which question is harder to answer?

In retrospect, almost 15 years after *Zelda no Densetsu Mujura no Kamen* (or *Majora's Mask*, as it was subtitled in the western world when the game released on the N64 in November, 2000), one would think time constraints helped shape the concept and urged the developers to create a very different offering, albeit one that re-used many ideas and assets.

Because while it may have resembled *Ocarina of Time's* Hyrule landscape and characters, *Majora's Mask* portrayed a twisted story through what is a masterful re-imagining of a world and its mechanics. It's amazing this unique title ended up being as beloved as it was: no other Zelda game would be created in this way and in such a manner. Ever.

Despite input from other veterans such as Mr. Miyamoto and Mr. Koizumi, Mr. Eiji Aonuma left a mark on his first Zelda entry as director, adding new meaning to the series' narrative and design, and with only a small team of talent developers, delivered that oft requested concept: the "compact Zelda".

As with many Japanese creators, Aonuma is a humble and respectful developer/designer/producer. He always wants to credit others for their original ideas and effort, and it's difficult to get him to define his own trademark style or point out which parts were

his own work, aside from always recalling his mantra of "surprising the player" in all his work. Which, by the way, is always a difficult task in a long-running and beloved series such as *Zelda*, where nostalgia, previous blockbusters, and new variations always have an impact on old and new players' thoughts. Not to mention evolutions in game design, technical limitations of the time, and Nintendo's usual hardware innovations. And let's not forget their main rule of always designing gameplay first, then story afterwards.

Long-time *Zelda* fans have learned how to identify Aonuma's conceptual style. His recursive designs. His companion characters. More light-hearted stories edged with a childish imagination. And of course his special touch in dungeon and enemy design since *Ocarina of Time*.

Now, after enjoying the renaissance of *Zelda* with *Wind Waker HD* on Wii U and *Ocarina's* remake on 3DS, and while currently trying to bring back the true open-world feeling of the series with this year's currently unnamed Wii U project, Aonuma-san now gets to see how his record-breaking, disturbing, time-twisting Nintendo 64 masterpiece will be received by a new audience as it launches on 3DS this month.

How was it then, and how is it now? How will it be? What lies in wait for the future of *Zelda*, both in terms of new adventures and in remade versions of past titles? This is, more than ever, a tale of contrast and changing times, for both Aonuma and his creations.

Majora's Mask features some darker, twisted narratives. Are any of those stories based on any personal nightmares or experiences? What were the key inspirations behind the game?

A big theme in Majora's Mask was the destined-to-be-destroyed-in-three-days world. Because of this, I felt that events occurring during it would be well suited to have a bit more of a darker feel to them. I also wanted to create a contrast with the straight fantasy in the previous title 'Ocarina of Time', so that was really how we ended up with such a dark world.

Many people consider Majora's Mask to be the best entry in the series. Why do you think this is, and would you consider MM to be game in the series most representative of your style as a designer?

I think it was definitely the unique game system – being able to wind back the clock and venture through and explore the same world over and over again – that really left an impression with fans of Majora's Mask. Having said that, it was actually Mr. Koizumi, my co-director on this project, who proposed this game system, so it would be more accurate to say the world reflects his style.

Majora's Mask 3D looks more colourful than the original game, even more than Ocarina of Time 3D when compared to the original N64 title. Will the update impact on the game's darker styling? How are you playing with colours this time?

The unique world that we tried to portray in Majora's Mask was one that was very dark overall. In order to create this

“I WANTED TO CREATE A CONTRAST WITH THE STRAIGHT FANTASY IN OCARINA OF TIME”

weird and creepy world, it was key that we to express this darkness in contrast with a world portrayed with vivid tones (i.e. polarising the tones). The resolution on the Nintendo 3DS is a lot higher so the range of these vivid tones has expanded, and although we may have delivered a more colourful world, the contrast with the 'darkness' of it has gotten that much stronger, making for a world that feels ever creepier than before.

What are the most significant changes that Zelda fans will notice in the remake? And how will you adapt the game to make it feel at home on the 3DS, and which of the handheld's features will you be taking advantage of?

Zelda games have long been known as being difficult to know when to stop playing, and this is especially true for Majora's Mask where you have the three-day cycle. I'm sure there must be a few users who lost track of time and played all night long! When we consider how to get people who now find it



AGEING WELL

Despite its mandatory recycling, the N64 Majora's Mask was praised for its varied texture work, modern FX and lengthy draw distances compared to Ocarina of Time. Thus, it required the old console's 4 MB RAM expansion pack. With tech limitations now a link to the past, the 3DS remake focuses on a smoother, sharper, more vivid and playable experience.

MUCH WANTED

Ever since OoT 3D launched in 2011, and with Nintendo publicly more open to remakes, Majora's Mask has been the most requested and anticipated by far. Aonuma himself admitted it was a logical step, then rumours and even jokes spread around the net while fans insisted on their 'needs'. Nintendo even went as far as celebrating last summer's festivities with the titular mask: an announcement was imminent.

AONUMA-SAN

Eiji Aonuma (51) is the main Zelda producer and franchise head, and he directed Majora's Mask, The Wind Waker and Twilight Princess. His input in storytelling and game design across 16 titles transformed the Zelda experience forever, since his role as designer in Ocarina of Time. But he started convincing Miyamoto-san of his growing talent many years before, during his NES days.

difficult to carve out time to play modern games playing, the concept of providing it on a handheld console and being able to stop whenever they like with Sleep Mode, although it sounds simple, actually came across as a huge advantage and hence why we began development on this remake. The advantage of using two screens on the Nintendo 3DS, allowing you to use various sub-screens without having to stop the game, worked well in Ocarina of Time 3D. We made it even easier to use here in Majora's Mask 3D, and also allowed for the camera to be freely moved using the New Nintendo 3DS C Stick. These additions free users from the sense of claustrophobia that the original had and is a new advantage that the remake has over the original.

How is the development process changing when approaching these remakes, and where do you draw the line when listening to fan feedback?

Quite a lot of time has passed since the original was released, and the lives of users who played it have changed a lot too. We can't guarantee that opinions we received from fans in the past would still be the same now, so first of all, as someone who worked on the game originally, I started by playing it again right through to the end. I took all the

"I WAS CAREFUL IN MAINTAINING A BALANCE BETWEEN WHAT SHOULD BE RE-DONE, AND WHAT SHOULD BE LEFT AS IT WAS"

elements that made the current me like it, as well as all those elements I didn't like, and started this remake with the intention of polishing up the good, and improving on the bad elements as much as possible. Thinking about things from the user's perspective, there was a lot that I wanted to 're-do', but re-doing everything to make things more user friendly risked losing half the feel of the game, and so I was careful in maintaining a balance between what should be re-done, and what should be left as it was.

The Fierce Deity Link that appears at the end of Majora's Mask has become something of a fan favourite. Are there any memories you can share regarding its creation? How do you feel about it nowadays, would you use it again in a different game?

We re-used the assets of Ocarina of Time to make Majora's Mask and there were certainly a few things that we really had to scratch our heads to figure out how we should re-use. The Fierce Deity Link is actually Adult Link from Ocarina of Time. I didn't think it would be interesting to use him just as is so we added him in as a final transformation; remaking him into more of a dark hero character, a little scary, but perfect for battling with the fantastical Majora. Thinking about it, all of the characters in Majora's Mask have their own uniqueness peculiar to this title; a uniqueness which doesn't really appear in any other title. Well, with the exception of Tingle of course...[laughs]

How have the lessons learned from Majora's Mask impacted on the design and creation of The Legend of Zelda Wii U?

As we saw with Ocarina of Time, recent Nintendo platforms have a unique advantage for Zelda games in that they have an extra screen, and I think that this is very important. Especially the fact that it is possible to show the map there. When I first showed off the new Zelda game on the Wii U, it seemed everyone was very excited and started proclaiming that a Zelda game had at last become open world! Zelda games have always allowed you to roam and explore a huge world as you rely on your map.

What's changed now is that the hardware has progressed to the point that you can now explore this vast world seamlessly; the underpinning of the game hasn't changed. Recently, I've taken to relying on the map on my smart phone when I'm out walking in a place I'm not familiar with. A map isn't something you keep tucked away in your bag, it's by holding it in your hand and being able to constantly check it as you move forward step by step that gives you that sense of adventure.

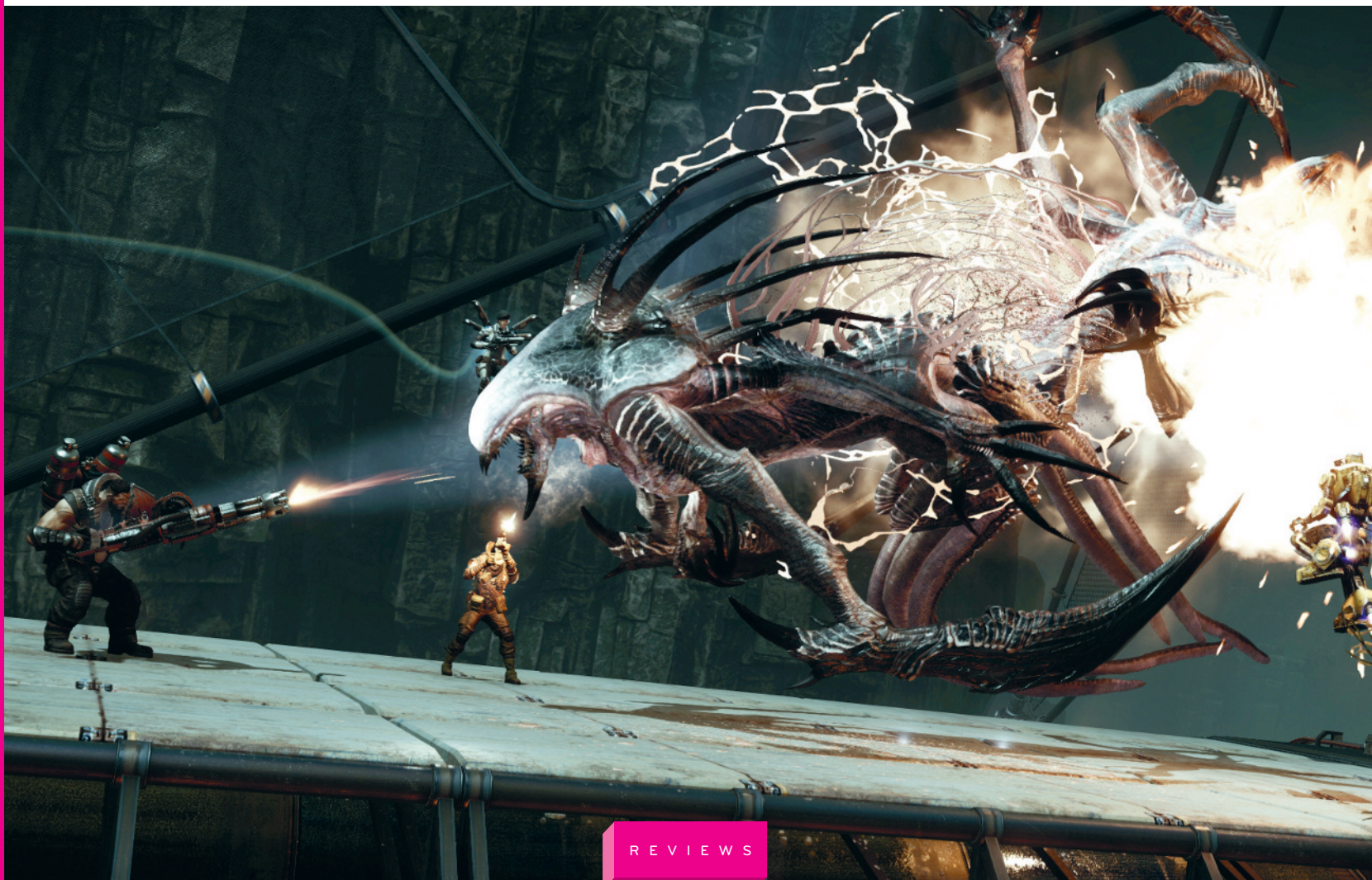
It's so simple a concept but something we cherish in Majora's Mask 3D, as well as in our new Wii U title (and likely something we will continue with in the future).

The world map as shown in the recent Wii U gameplay reveal looks huge. How are you transitioning between the more compact experience in Majora's Mask and the more expansive setting of the new Wii U game? How are you going to make sure that the bigger map doesn't feel empty?

A huge, seamlessly unfolding world is something that can't be achieved if the hardware isn't advanced enough, meaning it would have been very difficult to produce the effect on the Nintendo 64 where we first released Majora's Mask. (The development period was also supposed to be very short at just one year after all.) Ever since we made the very first generation of Legend of Zelda games though, we've had as large a world as can be realised with the hardware, so you could say it was inevitable that we've now done the same with the new Wii U title. (We also did the same with The Wind Waker on the GameCube, with its seamless ocean play field.)

With Majora's Mask on its way into the hands of gamers, and with the future of the series seemingly assured with the incoming Zelda game on Wii U, looking back, what other classics from the series would you like to see remade?

Remaking a game you've done before can really make you realise how lacking your previous ideas were, so I really don't like to do it [laughs]. Having said that though, making past games on newer Nintendo platforms gives us a ton of ideas on how to make the games feel new again and thinking about that really makes me want to play that new version. Imagining how happy the fans would be also makes me feel like we should make it. But again, if I'm going to make something, I prefer to make something new and give people a surprise.



REVIEWS

EVOLVE

f PLATFORM PC PS4 XBOX ONE GENRE ACTION DEVELOPER TURTLE ROCK STUDIOS PUBLISHER 2K GAMES RELEASE 10 FEBRUARY 2015

It's the age-old story. Humanity attempt colonisation of a planet and first fall victim to the alien flora and fauna. Then to something much bigger; huge creatures with insatiable appetites. Cue the rescue mission to evacuate the colony and minimise losses, and all within five days. Here's where you, and friends, come in.

You'll play as one of four members of a specialist team (there's another perspective which we'll get to shortly), dropped at strategic points on the world, and tasked with protecting colonists during evacuation and hunting down whatever huge beast is going at the survivors like a Nandos platter.

Each specialist has their own particular weapons and abilities. The Trapper must track down the beast and use an energy field to contain it in the immediate area and block its escape. The Assault must bring the armoured creature down with heavy weaponry, while the Medic and Support characters need to use their futuristic equipment to keep the team alive. The hunt itself, tracking down the beast that lurks somewhere on each map, is reminiscent of the Raids you'll see in MMORPGs, with smaller wildlife and dangers to contend against before even encountering what effectively is the map's boss. The twist, and that other perspective, is that the hulking creature can be controlled by another player.

Unlike the first-person perspective of the hunters, the monster handler plays in third-person, and the beast - there are three types available - dwarves the humans in size and sheer strength. However, at each round's start it's relatively weak and easy prey for a well-trained squad of hunters. The odds quickly decrease if the creature is given the chance to eat the local wildlife, digestion letting the beast evolve, unlocking new abilities and making it a much tougher predator.

It becomes a formidable opponent, and the only chance of success is for the hunters to work as a team. Coordination of each skill is absolutely vital to survival. So the broad strokes of the gameplay are defined: the alien fleeing its attackers, feeding, then trying to catch its pursuers off-guard, then fleeing again to repeat the evolution and unlock yet more abilities. The hunters trying to track, capture and kill their prey. Who is predator and who is prey bounces back and forth between the factions



repeatedly. There are different conditions for both factions depending on the game mode played, but the main thrust of this asymmetric multiplayer duel is simple and ingenious.

The big question though is how fast would the experience wear thin. While there is a single player mode with bots filling out the rest of the roles, this is mainly a multiplayer title that demands five players who know what they're doing to enjoy, a handful of modes with little variation between them and only three monsters at launch.

Variety comes through the synergy of the different specialist classes and the trio of characters in each stacked against three different monsters, and how each of those are controlled. We've seen aggressive monster players who target the hunters through their skillful exploitation of the terrain in early stages of a match. Or players who play stealth with their brute, laying false trails until your first encounter is the gigantic stage three mutation that's a terrifying foe.

Filtered through this is a perk system a dozen strong for both sides that can improve certain skills, plus the bonuses of elite creatures do make every match unique - and somehow there is really something here for every type of player. Lone wolves will love the role of the monster, while real team players are allowed to use Medic and Support to care for their colleagues. Trappers and Assault can be more aggressive with their tasks and so care less about the team dynamic.

We've sat through many, many hours of the alpha and beta, and poured a week so far into the final version of the game, and are amazed at the lack of wear on the gameplay. Each match is different and always exciting. You never know how good the competition is and must always assume the worst. There's a lot to learn and refine tactics and strategies. There's no grind, with perks and characters unlocked quickly and higher player levels awarded with mostly cosmetic additions. It means that knowledge and strategy become key to winning, rather than an unlocked weapon or ability.

Evolve is certainly not a game for everyone, but fans of innovative, strategic action will not be disappointed. It feels innovative and extremely exciting. It's new, fresh and gives an urgently-needed shot in the arm to the stagnating throng of triple-A shooters. It's a great idea for a title that's masterly crafted in the final product.



TOTAL WAR: ATTILA

7 PLATFORM PC GENRE STRATEGY DEVELOPER CREATIVE ASSEMBLY PUBLISHER SEGA RELEASE 17 FEBRUARY

Attila brought down an empire, and thus this new Total War title feels like a fitting sequel and conclusion to Rome II. Creative Assembly has added in a number of new features, and created a sandbox overflowing with possibilities. Once again a turn-based campaign is complimented by real-time battles. Climate change and a marauding army from the Steppes acts as the catalyst for huge upheaval across the continent. During the turn-based campaign, communities migrate to avoid long winters and sharp swords, leading to a dynamic shift across Europe as tribes relocate. There are plenty of historical parallels, but there's still room for unexpected events.

There's a nice blend of playable factions. The barbarian tribes, the Saxons and Franks, are challenging options that involve relocation and expansion. The migratory tribes, the Goths and Vandals, are also difficult to master thanks to the new horde mechanics (you can uproot your tribe until you find a new home), but they offer opportunity for player expression on the world map. The Sassanids represent a gentler option thanks to their starting position, while the Huns and their horseback armies offer destruction on a global scale. Players can also control either the Eastern or Western Roman Empires. There's something here for every type of player; you can either control a swollen empire and keep it steady, or lead a small tribe to glory.

The historical backdrop of turmoil keeps things interesting, and the dynamic sandbox offers plenty of surprises. CA has bolted on a few new features to the turn-based element. Most notably there's increased emphasis on political intrigue and the

struggle for power within each faction. They've tried to give your entourage a bit of personality via in-game events, but many of the decisions are so dry that it's hard to form a connection to the characters.

On the battlefield things are much as they ever were, but new tricks like dynamic fire, plus historically-relevant units, keeps the fighting fresh. Sieges have been improved, and there's a greater ebb and flow in battle as troops rally much more easily than before (great when it works in your favour, annoying when a rallied enemy unit returns to haunt you). Campaign battles are supplemented by custom options, plus there's historical scenarios and online modes (versus and co-op). Simply put, there's plenty to do.

We liked Attila a lot, but we're beginning to think that CA need to mix things up more in the future, rather than just layering new features on top of their existing framework.

For the most part the new mechanics compliment the old, but yet the campaign is starting to feel bloated in places. However, the underlying formula still works and there's room for satisfying emergent scenarios and unexpected twists and turns.

8



LIFE IS STRANGE - EPISODE I

1 PLATFORM PC PS3 PS4 XONE X360 GENRE ADVENTURE DEVELOPER DONTNOD PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX RELEASE 30 JANUARY

Life is Strange is a coming of age adventure starring a teenage girl called Max, who finds herself moving back to the small town she grew up in to study photography. She's navigating the pitfalls of high school, with jocks, douchebags, emotionally fragile girls, self-absorbed teachers, bullies and nerds, while trying to reconnect with her childhood best friend Chloe. Since Max left the town five years ago, Chloe's father has died and she turned into a teenager who smokes weed and doesn't give a damn. While Max is the timid and thoughtful, Chloe is rebellious and outspoken.

There is however one thing Chloe gives a damn about and that's Rachel. Rachel became her best friend after Max left and went missing 6 months ago. Everyone thinks she just ran away, but Chloe thinks something must have happened to her. The first episode focuses on introducing the setting, mechanics and the relationship between Max and the rest of the cast, but the mystery of Rachel will apparently be central to the plot later on in the season.

As you've no doubt guessed Life is Strange follows the familiar structure of a Telltale Games adventure. The season or game consists of 5 episodes, and rather than focusing on puzzle-solving, decisions and story are the main gameplay elements.

An interesting mechanic is introduced early in the episode. A traumatic event appears to trigger an ability to rewind time, thus giving Max an opportunity to alter what happens and save the life of a character central to the plot. We're now able to rewind time at her own pleasure making it possible to see shortterm consequences of actions and reverse your decisions.

As this is a first episode that plays out like a prologue it does leave us wanting more as it doesn't really deliver much in the

way of major drama. You get the feeling that most of what you do and decide in this first episode is setting you up for what's ahead. Another potential weak point is that many of the references and metaphor are fairly plaintext. Overall, the writing is great and the characters come across really well. The lack of lip sync does unfortunately taints the experience a little, and while we understand that this isn't a full scale AAA development, we still feel that perhaps some resources should have been spent in this area as the rest of the game looks great.

There are some great characters in Life is Strange. The only supernatural element is the time rewind power that Max possesses, but while fascinating in its own right it's not really central to the plot. This game is about what lies underneath the surface of this small town

Life is Strange offers something different and unusual. Not only is the protagonist a young female, but central to the story is her friendship with Chloe. But we found that rather than experiencing something exotic and strange, we are dealing with themes that are universal. We've all struggled to fit in at one point or another. We've all had that one childhood friend that we drifted apart from and lost

contact with. And we've all wished

8 at one point or another that we could have turned back time in order to do something differently.



GRIM FANDANGO

1 PLATFORM PS4 PS VITA GENRE ADVENTURE DEVELOPER DOUBLE FINE RELEASE 27 FEBRUARY 2015

Let's get this out of the way before we proceed any further: Grim Fandango is without a doubt one of the best adventure games ever made, and in many respects the pinnacle of the golden age of adventures.

Manny Calavera is trying his best to work off his debt (presumably after having lived a rotten life) and earn his ticket to the ninth underworld. He works at the Department of Death where he sells travel packages to the recently deceased. He just never seems to land any good clients (that would earn him a commission and help work off his debt) - instead he's stuck selling walking canes instead of first class tickets on the express train. At least that is how the story begins, but as you might expect you're in for a crazy ride with Manny, his scythe, and an eclectic cast.

If you haven't played the game previously you're in for many hours of enjoyment as you try and figure out the sometimes-less-than-obvious solutions to the puzzles Manny is facing. They're not the most farfetched solutions we've seen, but some will certainly take a few minutes to figure out.

The plot, the puzzle design, the characters, and the wonderfully designed Mexican themed afterlife, along with the sublime soundtrack, certainly holds up well enough after all these years. It's a genre that doesn't age as badly as many others and while newcomers will likely want to avoid the "tank" controls at all costs

The game is still essentially the same, with the exception of some improved texture quality, the option of playing it in 16:9 ratio (4:3 still exists as an option) and with modernised controls. While the design of the game has stood the test of time, this relatively early example of a 3D adventure isn't exactly a looker

At 12 quid it's decent value and it's certainly a game you need to play if

9 you've enjoyed the recent rebirth of the genre. If you've already played it you don't need convincing.



DYING LIGHT

7 PLATFORM PC PS4 XBOX ONE GENRE ACTION DEVELOPER TECHLAND PUBLISHER WARNER BROS. RELEASE 27 JANUARY 2015

The apocalypse caused by the rise of the living dead has been told over and over again, and the genre is showing some serious signs of fatigue. However, Techland, the studio that created the first Dead Island, still has faith in the appeal of viral outbreaks. Dying Light mixes the first-person action game with open-world exploration and RPG elements. There's also a definite flavour of parkour and a lead character that has to juggle his loyalty between multiple factions.

The city of Harran is in the grip of a zombie outbreak. Kyle Crane is an agent working for a major corporation called GRE, and he is parachuted into the city. Of course everything goes wrong the minute he gets there. It's nice to note that the lead character is not just a pair of floating hands, even if the entire game is seen through his eyes. His thoughts and ideas change during the game. The player has no say in how the story actually develops, so roleplaying is limited to the growth and improvement of the character's abilities. The storytelling tries its best to grab a hold of you by offering up emotional set pieces, but this doesn't always have the intended effect. The NPC personalities haven't been given enough attention and so you won't care much for their fates, and this causes a disconnect between the player and Kyle's emotions.

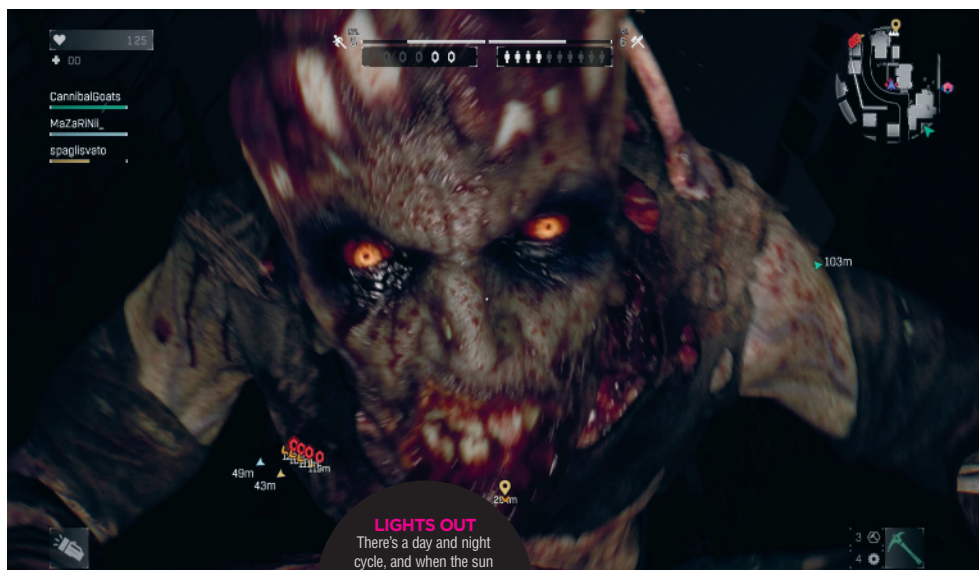
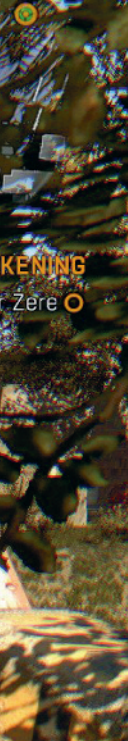
The world of Dying Light is divided into two large sandboxes and several smaller sections. The slums are a desolate place, and from there you go through the labyrinth of sewer pipes into Old Town. Here the elevation differences are greater than in the slums, which creates some challenges as far as movement and traversal goes. The story missions can take over an hour to complete. The game offers about 20 hours of

play all told, but you can easily spend much more time exploring the world and completing all the side-missions.

The open world is not the only thing to distinguish Techland's zombie game from its competitors. The other major difference can be found in the movement, which in this case is basically parkour. It takes some time to get a hang of it, but once mastered zipping through the urban environment becomes a real joy. Kyle also gets a grappling hook at one point, which allows even faster traversal.

Encounters with the undead consist mainly of melee combat, but there are some firearms as well. However, guns never dominate the action at any point; the ammo is very limited and gunshots attract more zombies. Kyle gets experience points from kills and actions, and these can be used to enhance his abilities from a set of skill trees.

There's a day and night cycle in the game, and that really alters the nature of the game. During night there are more kinds of zombies roaming around, and some of these are hunting the player. At first you tend to avoid going out at night, and just spend your evenings in one of the city's many safe houses, but after you get some experience under your



LIGHTS OUT
There's a day and night cycle, and when the sun goes down things start getting much more dangerous. That is until you've earned some new skills.



belt, you start to see the darkness as a challenge rather than a threat. You also get double XP during night, which acts as motivation to venture out under the stars.

Multiplayer is online only (no split-screen sadly). There can be a maximum of four players in one session, and the missions progress according to the campaign progress of the host. Visitors can of course enjoy all the benefits of gaining experience and finding some nice loot. Playing together is great, but it demands constant communication. Therefore playing with a familiar group is recommended, as the level of co-operation required might not gel with strangers.

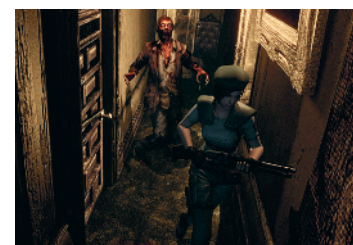
There is a competitive multiplayer mode called Zombie Invasion, that lets you also play as one of the living dead by selecting the Be a Zombie option. Here a maximum of four humans try to destroy zombie nests, while one of the creatures tries to defend its territory. While Dying Light's main charm lies in exploring the open world, in completing the missions alone or with friends, the Invasion mode is a nice addition.

From a graphical standpoint the game looks great most of the time. The draw distance stretches off into the horizon, and the little details strewn across the city are really nice. This is

especially true when the sun casts its setting rays over the buildings. That said, it's a bit of a shame when at times you come face-to-face with downright ugly, pixelated textures. Thankfully there aren't many of them in the game. The soundscape mainly consists of different audio effects and character dialogue, which creates a strong sense of immersion. Music sticks to the background, but gains more volume when it gets dark.

We were positively surprised at how much fun Techland has managed to get out of such a worn and overused motif. The story won't immerse you as much as it should, but that's perfectly acceptable in this sort of game. The storytelling is a step forward for the studio, even if it's not of the highest calibre; but it's certainly better than Dead Island and Riptide before it. If you've still got a thing for zombies, you should definitely give Dying Light a shot (in the head).

8



RESIDENT EVIL HD

PLATFORM PC PS4 PS3 XONE X360 DEVELOPER CAPCOM
PUBLISHER CAPCOM RELEASE JANUARY 20 2015

It is a competent remaster, but Capcom could and should have gone a little further with this update.

The pre-rendered backgrounds are improved since the original, but they are still pixelated in parts, becoming especially apparent on a big TV. The worst part though are the videos that play during the game, which are ridiculously low resolution. Some videos, such as the introduction, have reasonable quality, but most are horrible. Fortunately, there's only a few to sit through. The price tag (£15.99) seems a little high. Offering it for under a tenner would have been more tempting.

Even with the upgrades, Resident Evil is an old school game and for modern players its mechanics may be hard to adjust to. The archaic controls, the fixed camera angles, the limited saves system... if you've never played a game from the 90s era, it may be difficult to get into Resident Evil. Even veterans may need a bit of time to re-adjust, but it will be worth it.

Part of its charm lies in the limitations and difficulties it imposes. If you play at the highest difficulty (selected by default and it is how you should play Resident Evil), it'll be tough, but enjoyable.

And while it's outdated in parts, it deserves its status as a masterpiece. The 1996 original, paved the way for the survival horror genre and this 2002 remake raised the experience to a new level. The game was visually stunning at the time (especially because the locations were pre-rendered), and that means it has stood the test of time.

This HD remastering itself is a mixed bag, competent without going the extra mile, but the experience itself is still fantastic. If you've never played a Resident Evil game pre-Resident Evil 4, you may struggle to accept the archaic mechanics, but if you were a fan of the first games and did not have the chance to play the Gamecube/Wii remake, you owe it to yourself to revisit the story that spawned it all.

7



SAINTS ROW: GAT OUT OF HELL

7 PLATFORM PC PS4 PS3 XONE X360 GENRE ACTION DEVELOPER VOLITION / HIGH VOLTAGE PUBLISHER DEEP SILVER RELEASE 22 JANUARY 2015

Gat out of Hell is a standalone expansion for Saints Row IV that takes some familiar characters and sends them to New Hades, a small and action-packed sandbox world governed by the Devil himself. It looks good thanks to great art design, but in terms of structure there's nothing particularly dynamic about this new offering. Story missions have been replaced by cutscenes, which move the story along but don't really invest you in the narrative in the same way as some of the missions did in SRIV. The setup is actually very simple; you head off to the four corners of Hell (actually, it's five districts) and help characters who don't like Satan gain control over their respective areas. Influence over a particular area is achieved by completing various tasks, many of which players will remember as being mere activities and distractions from previous games. Here they're turned into the main event. For the most part these are reworked variants of previous offerings, but there are a couple of modes that feel fresh.

The story is suitably batshit. At one point the whole thing descends into musical theatre, and there's plenty of decent jokes that'll have you chuckling along with the action. The only major problem is the story feels a little rushed, and we're not given enough of a build up to really enjoy it as it unfolds. It just kind of... happens.

The usual funny, foul-mouthed dialogue is present, and the guns are as ridiculous as you would expect, and there's plenty of special abilities to unlock and upgrade. They do a great job of making you feel super-powered, and along with a growing repertoire of devastating abilities, Johnny and Kinzie can also both fly around with

huge angelic wings. If anything, progression is too quick, and it's not long before you're overpowered enough to deal with anything the game throws at you (our advice is to stick it on hard straight away).

The relative ease of progression means that you can clock through the bulk of the game in six or seven hours (more if you want to complete all of the activities and bag all the collectibles). There's not a whole lot to the story, which is a pity because what's there feels fresh and is largely enjoyable. In terms of structure it's very limited, and apart from a couple of interesting missions, it lacks the dynamic edge found in the story-driven levels of its predecessor; ultimately it's just a rehash of old activities and distractions woven into the fabric of a new sandbox.

Still, it's mostly fun and a nice way to burn through a couple of afternoons. If you're getting this as part of Saints Row IV: Re-elected then it's far easier to recommend as an expansion, but bought as a standalone for £14.99, it's not as simple to endorse. Judging it on its own merits alone, this is an enjoyable but limited open-world adventure.

6



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

1 PLATFORM NINTENDO 3DS GENRE ADVENTURE DEVELOPER NINTENDO PUBLISHER NINTENDO RELEASE 13 FEBRUARY 2015

The Majora's Mask remake for Nintendo 3DS was a given ever since Ocarina of Time 3D's launch almost four years ago. But as Nintendo hesitated with its announcement, we began replaying the Nintendo 64 original last fall. Convenient, as we can compare the two experiences with the N64 experience fresh in mind.

Although it may sound shocking, it's not the more detailed graphics and 3D effect that are the most welcome additions, but those elements that make gameplay more comfortable and natural. We can no longer imagine playing either this or Ocarina of Time without the second touch screen. There are so many items, weapons and masks, it's great to have as many options available to the thumb. And the map; blessed be the map! It greatly facilitates navigation to glance down to take a look, or to zoom in on the current room by touching the screen. The dungeons have benefited a lot from this system.

But there's another side to the coin, as there's a worry that the conversion has gone too far in making the experience more accessible than what it had once been. We were afraid they'd add too many clues and hand-holding given the confusing nature of the adventure, and that the challenge would suffer as a result.

Well, this isn't the case. We notice extra help in the early stages with some additional indicators, but not to the point where it's annoying (and as the opening hours of Majora's Mask were a bit of a mess, some additional guidance is not a bad thing) and soon enough you're playing the same game we all love and remember, with its twisted approach, its mysteries and its challenging difficulty level.

We also don't mind that the Bombers' Notebook, detailing who is where doing what at which time, is more prominent and streamlined, because while we honestly ignored it in the original

game. It's an ideal way to keep track of all side quests, characters and, most importantly, an hourly schedule of events in the three days that the game covers.

Now less hostile with increased accessibility, you'll quickly get your head round the concept of Majora's Mask. You're locked in looping the same three days over and over, uncovering multiple events and stories unfolding in parallel over the time period as you explore.

As you're discovering them, you're also progressing the plot by completing dungeons, getting items/masks/powers, learning magic melodies and unlocking the remaining parts of the map. Not too dissimilar to the structure of Ocarina of Time, but here you're aware of the ticking of the clock, and the need to travel back in time to the dawn of the first day.

Although we can still praise the original idea, many timetable-dependent tasks have not aged as well, and can be a chore today. We understand that this adds even more difficulty and requires planning your game time strategically, but there are events that could have been streamlined because they simply feel outdated. These few drawbacks do not mean that the game design is obsolete as a whole by any means; the overall structure is commendable even today. Fifteen

9 years old and created in a single year, Majora's Mask is still a masterpiece of game design.



THE ESCAPISTS

2 PLATFORM PC XBOX ONE GENRE SIM DEVELOPER MOULDY TOOF STUDIOS RELEASE 13 FEB 2015

Prison life is bleak and follows its own stupid rules: get up, appeal, eat, work, eat, work out, leisure, work, eat. But there are other rules behind the routine: discord, violence, corruption, trade, production, breaking out.

The Escapists is the creation of one man, Chris Davis, who wanted to recreate a ZX Spectrum title called School Days. It began life on Kickstarter before Team 17 picked it up, and here it arrives on Xbox One to sit alongside the PC version.

Unfortunately the game doesn't come with the prison editor that looks to be the long-term lifeblood of the PC build, as according to the creator, it's too fiddly with the controller. A shame, given the likes of Minecraft on console are proving a hit.

The game puts you into one of six prisons, with a varying level of difficulty and complexity. It's not an easy start, as you understand little about your setup, the locale or the people you're stuck behind bars with.

A mini-tutorial helps point out the other side of prison life though, and soon enough you'll form alliances, collect knowledge about which items can be combined together to form new equipment, which inmates are best to avoid, and when is the ideal moment for a soap blow to the back of the head with a soap-filled sock... or a pickaxe.

You'll be caught with illegal goods, be put in solitary confinement, get beaten down by guards and sabotaged by fellow prisoners. Despite the basic pixelated graphics, this is a bitter experience, blocky sprites not softening the violence that happens so often across the cell blocks.

But what that does do is drive the need, the want, to escape as soon as possible, no matter what the cost. Suffering can help forge a good plan. And putting together a quality plan is the core here. The game may look basic, but it's built on solid foundations and a great gameplay hook.

8

Promotion



LOAD UP AND RELEASE THE SAFETY - WHY YOU NEED S.K.I.L.L.!

S.K.I.L.L. - Special Force 2 is a full-action first-person shooter based on the Unreal Engine 3. For friends of efficient elimination - happily paired with gigantic explosions - this free title is an absolute must.

Grab your combat gear, check your weapons and dive into a near-future world where a global conflict rages.

S.K.I.L.L. stands for 'Secret Kommando: Infiltrate. Liquidate. Liberate'. The shooter stands out from the crowd through intense action and fun that's guaranteed to keep you coming back for more.

The widely varying gameplay takes place on over 20 maps in different scenarios.

This means close-quarter urban battles and exciting missions across the whole world! The adrenaline levels for PC front line fighters are kept high thanks to more than 10 different game modes.

Just like real war zones, S.K.I.L.L. thrives through the cooperation of well-trained teams. In individually created and established clans, player teams compete to reach the top in ranking lists and also take part in tournaments. On top of this, S.K.I.L.L. focuses on realism in more than its graphics and sound: players can choose from special forces units from around the world and the game is packed with an arsenal of real-world weaponry as well as their potential modifications.

ALL SOLDIERS TO BATTLE STATIONS - ALIEN CONTACT MADE!

Why not battle against hundreds of attacking insects from space with an AK-47? S.K.I.L.L. has some innovative modes ready and waiting: alongside the usual stalwarts of the shooter genre (free for all, deathmatch), players are also offered something that's out of this world. In 'Hero Mode', for example, they can experience all the elements of a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA).



A particularly tasty treat is the Sectoid game mode. The task at hand here is to fight back an invasion of rather evil aliens or even, for a short while, to slip into their skin - no, their armour - and fight humanity.

In 'Manhunt', soldiers (or aliens) enter in demanding 8 vs 8 battles; 'Survival' mode on the other hand pits players against ever-stronger waves of the extra-terrestrial insects and 'Defence' mode has players defending a control device that has to be protected at all costs.

S.K.I.L.L. IN ESPORTS: FAME, HONOUR AND REAL CASH!

This is the thrilling world of eSports: there's regular matches, league games and tournaments all taking place thanks to partnerships with organisers such as the Electronic Sports League (ESL), where the best players go up against each other.

These tournaments don't just reveal the most accurate and deadly soldiers to the world - they also fill the player's war purse: in 2014 alone over 50,000 dollars was handed out in prize money - with the amount only set to increase! In addition, the performances in tournaments are also rewarded with practical in-game prizes. To really get hearts racing in the finals, matches are played out offline in the ESL's TV Studio.



WHERE CAN I SIGN UP?

S.K.I.L.L. was released by South Korean developer Dragonfly and the free-to-play title was unleashed on Europe by Gameforge. Those who wish to prove themselves as elite soldiers can sign up for free at any time.

Load up and release the safety: download S.K.I.L.L. on

www.skill.gameforge.com

Head to www.gamereactor.co.uk/gadgets for the latest gadget reviews.

GADGETS



1 PLANTRONICS BACKBEAT PRO

HEADSET | PLANTRONICS | £249.99

With the new Backbeat Plantronics hopes to challenge headset leader Bose. The design is gorgeous: this is a well-crafted and luxurious piece of hardware. The batteries are almost everlasting and the noise cancelling works almost as well as the recent Quiet Comfort 25. Add to that a deep bass register, lots of handy features and great comfort. Unfortunately there are

7 some annoyances, such as in passive mode the sound is somewhat muffled.

2 BOSE QUIETCOMFORT 25

HEADSET | BOSE | £269.99

Bose were way ahead of the pack as far as active noise reduction with their previous Quiet Comfort 15 headset. The follow-up, Quiet Comfort 25, isn't just an improvement in this area, but it also offers a warmer and more dynamic soundscape that eclipses everything Bose has previously delivered in headphones. The sound is superb, the fit amazing and Quiet Comfort 25 is

9 even impressive when in passive mode. Bose are once again top of the class.

3 SAMSUNG 4K-65

LED-TV | SAMSUNG | £3999.99

Samsung's curved 4K-65 impresses us right out of the box with no lag, brilliant image handling, an enjoyable smoothness during intense rounds of Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, which continues to offer incredible sharpness. We have measured the input lag to 31 ms, which is very good for such a large 4K screen and the white balance is far better than what we've previously

10 experienced with Samsung's screens. Great functionality, and gorgeous design as well.

4 GENELEC G TWO

MIXING MONITOR | GENELEC | £1780

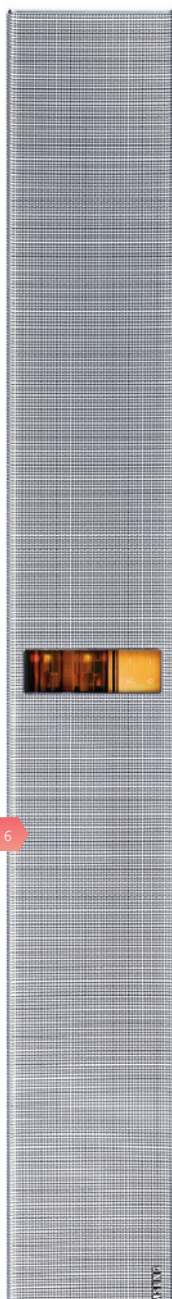
Finnish company Genelec have, over the years, claimed their spot as one of the best manufacturers of studio mixing monitors. The soundscape is neutral and very detailed without ever being too focused on descant (something many active studio monitors suffer from). During the last few weeks we've enjoyed G Two with games like Crysis 3 and Far Cry 4 where brilliant accoustics

9 and bombastic explosions make up the basis of the sound. Expensive, but good.



GOING THE WAY OF 4K

Ultra HD (as Samsung calls it) or 4K means a resolution of 3840x2160 pixel, four times the pixels compared to that of 1920x1080 (Full HD). Today there's no disc format that supports 4K resolution, but in November Sony and Panasonic plan on releasing the first 4K capable Blu-Ray players and Disney and Universal have committed to bringing out around 30 titles this autumn.



5 BOSE SOUNDLINK COLOUR

BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS | BOSE | £119.99

Soundlink Colour isn't a successor to Soundlink Mini or Soundlink III, but instead it's a colourful younger sibling that costs barely half as much. In spite of Bose cutting down on components, size and soundchip, it is once again incredibly impressive how much heft that they've been able to fit into this little device. The sound is warm and well-rounded, filled to the brim with

8 controlled bass. It doesn't have the full quota of goods, but it's great value at the price.

6 SAMSUNG HW-H750

SOUNDBAR | SAMSUNG | £499.99

The Sonos Playbar is our preferred hardware when it comes to soundbars. It wasn't a given that Samsung's more expensive version would be able to compete, but HW-H750 has proven over the last month that it is one of the best soundbars we've ever tested. Vacuum tube amplifier, 8" subwoofer, and an extremely handy remote control makes this a very attractive kit. Distinct

8 dialogue sound and lots of depth makes HW-H750 a brilliant choice.

7 SAMSUNG S27D590C

LED-MONITOR | SAMSUNG | £349.99

If you're looking for a curved computer monitor with great design and a minimal amount of input lag, as well as tremendous luminosity, then Samsung's latest 27" offering fits the bill. The screen is based on a TN panel which makes it ideal for gaming, but not optimal for those who spend their time with photoshop or layout work. But it should be applauded for its quick

7 image handling, neutral colour scheme out of the box and design. A good choice.

8 PANASONIC LUMIX GMI

CAMERA | PANASONIC | £629.99

It almost looks like a toy. Tiny, cute and with a retro-designed exterior. The image quality that it delivers is far from that of a toy as it doesn't just live up to the standard of our old EOS 1000D, but also beats the far more expensive Sony RX100-3. Interchangeable optics, easily controlled touchscreen, simple interface, great button layout. The image quality is tremendous and there's

9 minimal noise, even at 6400. Few compact cameras are as impressive.



SONY'S OLED?

Since 2012 Sony has worked with Panasonic to produce Oled screens for their upcoming TV line-up. Initially the plan was to present Sony's first Oled-TV at last year's CES, but shortly prior to the show they announced that the joint venture had been abandoned due to costly production and technical issues. That leaves LG with the only Oled screens on the market for at least one more year.



9 SONY KD-65S9005B

LED-TV | SONY | £3199.99

That flatscreens provide us with thin and tinny, often obscured sound is something we've learnt to accept. Building decent loudspeakers within the inch thick frames is simply impossible, something that has resulted in most manufacturers giving up on built-in sound and instead offering soundbars. All manufacturers except Sony, who with S9005B delivers the first flatscreen TV with DTS sound that, believe or not, excels even when it comes to the explosions in Guardians of the Galaxy. Add to this brilliant contrast and rich black - up to the standard set by class leading Samsung UE65HU8205 - and great colour temperatures. A nice touch is that the menus are similar to that of the PlayStation 4 and it is very easy to control with the two remote controls that come with it. Among the games we've played during our test period with S9005B was Alien: Isolation, and we were thoroughly impressed by the depth of the blackness while the image retains lots of dynamic and balance. The perfect choice if you want gorgeous picture and sound in one package.

10 POLK STRIKER ZX

HEADSET | POLK | £49.99

The selection of top quality Xbox One specific headsets has been relatively thin during the last year. The latest addition is this: Polk's Striker model, which offers a solid frame with good quality audio. It's good to see the American firm Polk focus on the fundamentals rather than adding more or less unnecessary smaller features. The ZX headset provides great sound given the low price. The microphone is mediocre, but the rest impresses.

11 THRUSTMASTER TX

RACING WHEEL | THRUSTMASTER | £239.99

While the T500 RS is Thrustmaster's flagship as far as premium racing wheels for serious simulation fans goes, it's not the only worthwhile quality wheel out of Thrustmaster, as the Xbox One compatible TX has also impressed. We've used the steering wheel with The Crew and Forza Horizon 2. It offers a powerful electrical engine, has a quality feel to it and the force feedback features are simply magnificent. The pedals feel a bit cheap though.



12 JVC DLA-X700R

PROJECTOR | JVC | £7,300

The fact that JVC and Sony have battled it out over the last decade to be the best on the projector scene is hardly news to those interested in top of the line home cinema setups. While Sony's Lcos projectors have always had an edge in terms of luminosity, blackness and sharpness has been the strengths of JVC. The new X series of projectors from JVC have outperformed Sony lately in spite of the E-shift technology being unable to provide a proper 4K image. X700R is very expensive, weighs in at 20.6 kilos and is almost twice the weight of our previous reference projector HD750. It's a true beast only suitable for the die-hard home cinema enthusiast. The image it delivers is astounding, even prior to being properly calibrated. The blackness achieved is incredible and at times X700R gives off Oled vibes. There's a depth to the image we've never before seen from a projector and the fluidity, handling of motions and contrast are extremely impressive. It's a new favourite, despite the high price.



13 SONY MDR-Z7

HEADSET | SONY | £550

Sony have been putting a lot of effort into high definition sound during the last year. Anyone who has listened to their favourite bands in studio quality (24-bits) and compared it to Spotify know the difference it makes. 24-bit audio contains 256 times the information of a CD and almost 400 times more than what is contained in a Spotify file. We didn't really have any expectations on Z7 as the sound in previous headphones has been a bit too mechanical and sharp for our tastes. We were caught off-guard as we listened to MDR-Z7 for the first time as it offered warm sounds and bass strength that outperforms anything Sony has previously delivered by a wide margin. The design is well executed and there is great comfort with this quality build. The high definition sound is dynamic, incredibly detailed, full of warmth and bass while the headphones never surrender at high volumes or cut off at higher registers. The gigantic elements (70 mm) means that it often feels as if we're wearing a couple of good size loudspeakers on each side of our heads.

CLASSIC

THE OCARINA OF TIME

Insomniac's **JAMES STEVENSON** lives up to his studio's name when he lost sleep (and risked hypothermia) to play Nintendo's classic.

"My favourite game of all time, easily, is The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. I'll always remember going out and buying it at midnight, as part of a midnight release at Wallmart. It was one of those experiences I'll never forget, in a frozen Nebraskan night, and nearly dying on the way home. I didn't get to bed to about 4.30 in the morning. I had to give up and get some sleep eventually, but I woke up immediately excited to get back in and play some more. It was a Thanksgiving weekend in the United States, so I stayed up the whole weekend; all I was doing was playing that game, exploring that world.

It was amazing to see the world of Zelda recreated in 3D for the first time, and a magical moment to see that horse and Hyrule Field. I'd played all the Zelda games by that point. Link's Awakening was the one that always blew my mind as well, playing it on Game Boy, when you're sitting outside surrounded by friends. I'd been a huge Zelda fan. That was a seminal moment in gaming, seeing that jump to 3D."



PLAY IT

While it's still to get a digital re-release on Wii U's eShop, you can pick up the handheld version for the 3DS, which offers a remastered visual upgrade alongside a 3D conversion.

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PLAYSTATION NINTENDO PC MOBILE FEBRUARY 2015 ISSUE 17

DYING LIGHT

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

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